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Youth Influence The Real Deal



SALTO-YOUTH
PARTICIPATION
RESOURCE CENTRE



Education and Culture



Youth Influence The Real Deal



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Preface

Youth Participation is one of the most important issues in the European youth field. It is both recognised as an important principle in European Youth Policy and also seen as a challenging aspect to be further developed and promoted in the local community.

As stakeholders in the Youth in Action Programme, which promotes equal opportunities for young people to play an active role in democratic life*, we wanted to analyse the realities faced by young people in their communities and to answer the following questions: Do young people really have the space and means to get involved in decisions that may affect them? What resources are available to them in this context and what are the existing structures?

The aims of the seminar *Youth Influence at local level* were to assess the situation in Europe, to identify some good practices which could be transferred to other contexts, and last but not least, to collect data about potential resources which can support any youth influence initiative.

In this way, the support provided by some local structures during the seminar contributed to discovering the local realities and some inspirational initiatives implemented in the field of Youth Participation and its specific dimension, such as Youth Influence. This would not have been possible without the valuable contribution from the Swedish municipality of Jönköping which was involved as a partner throughout the implementation process of the seminar.

The follow up evaluation** showed that the pedagogical approach during the seminar was successful as the participants were able to contribute by introducing their own local Youth Influence experiences and learn about other existing practices in Europe. The present booklet is therefore intended to spread these outcomes to a wider audience in order to inspire some initiatives and invite any concerned stakeholder to further support Youth Participation.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs and the SALTO - YOUTH Participation Resource Centre hope that you will enjoy reading this publication and that you will find it useful and inspiring.

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* The programme refers to the Council Resolution on the common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04) of 25 November 2003, OJ C 295 of 5.12.2003, pp. 6-8.

** Further details about this evaluation can be found on the pedagogical final report on <http://www.salto-youth.net/Participationcourses>

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The youth influence seminar

Introduction

Youth is a period in life when impressions are formed, knowledge gathered and the hard facts of life become apparent. Young people are a resource in our society. Their knowledge, experiences and values are precious. In recent years a growing number of European, national, regional and local initiatives strengthening young people's participation have emerged. But we still have a long way to go.

This booklet is the outcome of a seminar on youth influence that was held in Jönköping Municipality, Sweden, in spring 2009 and was attended by people from sixteen different European countries, all of whom, in one way or another, work with, and for, young people. The participants were a mixture of youth workers, people representing various youth organizations active at a local level, and youth policy stakeholders representing local and regional public bodies. This compendium has been written to illuminate European structures linked to national conditions in youth work, elaborate success factors and function as a springboard for meeting future challenges in the field. If you are a youth worker in a Non-Governmental Organisation, NGO, or local government, or a politician with local/regional responsibilities, we hope you will find it full of inspiration and ideas on how to achieve REAL youth influence at local level.

The seminar aimed to demonstrate structures for genuine youth influence and to identify best practices that are to be adapted for implementation at a local level. One conclusion was that we all have something to gain from youth participating in decision-making processes and being responsible members of society. As one of the participants said "a lot of projects and measures are there for show; a youth council for example does not guarantee that youth have real influence. However, when young people do feel that they have a say, that their opinions really matters and that they make a difference, then we believe they will become responsible adults, with a strong belief in themselves and in the possibilities of democracy."



The countries of Europe are at different levels when it comes to youth influence, but a number of success factors and methods were identified that might help in achieving objectives when dealing with real youth influence.

Conclusions from the seminar - influence cannot be faked

The differences among European countries are evident when it comes to young people and their influence in society. Youth policy in general is a fairly new concept in several countries, while others have decades of solid youth policy work behind them, with all that implies in terms of research, awareness within the political arena and an understanding of the necessity of youth participation. Fortunately, the similarities are more prominent than the differences. Several methods of exerting influence were shared and in the process the participants identified important factors that proved to facilitate good results in most youth projects. Key words that describe these success factors were **responsibility** - daring to trust and to be trusted in return -, **flexibility** - young people are not a single, homogenous group and should not be treated as if they were and **encouragement** - support for ideas and participation is crucial. Another element of success that was pinpointed is the involvement of open-minded and interested politicians. No youth worker alone can produce

and maintain a positive environment for youth participation and influence. Fortunately, political winds within the EU are blowing in favour of youth workers, and there is a clearly stated political mandate for supporting youth work, active citizenship and youth participation, helping less experienced municipal/regional decision-makers in making the right calls, and emphasising the importance of youth policy work.

There are key factors for real youth influence. Two fundamental facts are a) that young people are listened to and b) that they have a chance to become involved in decision-making. Successful work with youth influence also means that you have to take them seriously. You cannot pretend that to hear what a young person is saying if you have already decided in advance what your answer will be. You cannot pretend to involve young people in decision-making and then fail to do so. They will read you and can always detect a fake.



Many participants discovered that during the seminar they had come to see their own work as part of a much bigger picture. To mirror local activities in an international context was a good experience that gave them a new perspective on their own work. The knowledge of the EU vocabulary gained through the lectures and workshops on the White Paper¹, OMC² and the Youth Pact³ also changed their perspectives. The seminar ended with a mutual feeling that interaction with experienced youth workers (although on different levels) gave fresh impetus to their own work, but most of all it reinforced their starting a process of reflecting on their own achievements. A seminar with cultural and international input spurs individuals to develop new problem-solving methods within their own profession.

Although the participants faced different conditions in their daily work, and even if all methods were not applicable in all contexts, the seminar was a success and resulted in many new ideas, projects and future cooperation within these countries as well as between them.

The nature of youth influence

There is a difference between participation and influence

Action to support young people's participation in democratic life is better coordinated on a European level since the OMC was established in 2002. The means used by EU Member States to achieve the common objectives for the participation of young people comprise the reinforcement of frameworks, support for participatory and representative structures and for projects. The legal framework in the field of youth participation has also been improved. A number of Member States have adopted legislation, while others have developed strategic action plans or made fresh commitments to consult young people.

The interpretation of the terms influence and participation differs from one country to another and from one youth worker to another. At the seminar it became clear that influence has a stronger meaning to most youth workers, as some of the

participants explained that you may participate in an activity without being able to influence its content and outcome. Others objected and claimed that being a party to an activity automatically provided an opportunity to exert influence and in that sense some degree of real participation was achieved. Everyone agreed that it was an unfortunate fact that quite a number of young people were used as a cosmetic alibi by various organizations and in different political contexts. There is no guarantee that real influence will result from activities such as youth councils, open space meetings or dialogues between young people and decision-makers. It depends on the circumstances, the awareness of youth workers, the genuine intentions of the politicians and the existing local/regional and national structures.

The revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life⁴ provides a definition of youth participation in a broader perspective than merely that of participation in youth councils or as a political instrument.

“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship are about having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions, and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”

(from the manual Have Your Say, page 12)



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The definition stresses that to participate means having influence on, and responsibility for, decisions and actions that are important to young people. Citizens have the right to participate in a democratic society and young people are no exception⁵. Youth participation means the right of children ⁶and young people to be heard and involved in decision-making, whether at home, in the general life of the community, at school or in individual legal and administrative matters that concern them.

Political action programmes exist at European, national and local levels, but this does not guarantee the success of real youth influence. There is an opportunity for young people to influence society but there is still a major need to map out functioning methods, discuss best practice and identify success factors.

Mirror the discussions at the seminar

During the seminar several opportunities arose for discussion among the participants. The tasks discussed were differences and similarities among different countries; experiences were compared and ideas exchanged. Given the structural and cultural differences among countries, it was clear that it is not possible to copy a project or a method and apply it directly to another local or national context. There were a few factors for success that seemed universal, and merely having an opportunity to discuss problems and solutions with colleagues in Europe provided considerable inspiration for the future.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

"Meetings are so important. I wish that many more Polish delegates were able to participate in this kind of international meeting. In Poland, there is a widespread feeling of powerlessness and if more people could go abroad to see that influence is not about miracles but about hard work, they would know that opportunities exist."

(Shimon from Poland)

In Poland, as the participants explained, there is a wide gap between the people and the decision-makers. The social hierarchy is much stronger than, for example, in the Scandinavian countries and people sometimes experience difficulties in getting on speaking terms with decision-makers. The youth sector is not a priority for the politicians, according to the Polish participants. As a youth worker there is limited room to manoeuvre when trying to work with the public political structure. To a certain extent the youth policy of the European Union forces the politicians to take action and to open up channels for communication with young people. Youth issues are still a matter for voluntary associations and NGOs, with little or no contact with the authorities.

The diametrical opposite of Poland seems to be a country such as Luxemburg, with a totally different structure and also just half a million inhabitants. There, the structure is unique in some sense as a national youth service has direct responsibility for all youth centres, which are places that offer different activities for young people all over the country. This National Youth Service contributes funds for projects devised by young people at the youth clubs, and the youth workers employed there help them to realize their ideas. Each youth worker needs to play an active role in these projects since youth workers are responsible for the project budget.

Since it seems that the Netherlands is a country with a high level of youth participation and awareness by the authorities of issues concerning young people, the Dutch participants actually



appeared to be quite satisfied with the conditions in which they worked. The Netherlands has an established system for meeting young people, while the Dutch participants claimed an awareness of knowing how to approach young people who are not yet organised. Youth issues have been decentralized in the Netherlands since the late Eighties. This fact is considered the main reason for success as it facilitates a broader spectrum of policy instruments for local and provincial authorities. It allows solutions to be found to local issues, needs and demands on an individual and sometimes even a face-to-face basis. Secondly, a distinction is made between general and preventive youth policy, for which the local authorities are responsible. In 2007 a Ministry of Youth and Families was established primarily to respond to the need for coordination and supervision, with special emphasis on young people who are disadvantaged and thus have fewer opportunities.

Implementation of projects to promote youth participation - three local examples

Details of many projects and good practices were shared during the seminar. Three examples of how good projects can be implemented within local structures were highlighted since they are all different from each other. These examples are from Poland, Sweden and Ireland and were described by those who, in one way or another, were involved in these projects. They are good examples of existing methods but can also be seen as examples of how differing local conditions allow a certain level of participation.

1. Krakow, Poland: Lukasz is a student in his hometown, but he also volunteers as a scout leader. One way that he uses to promote youth participation in his environment is to arrange "family picnics". He describes this as a kind of social gathering where inhabitants from different environments and backgrounds can meet and enjoy a good time together. Most important, he says, is when the young people prepare this event, which gives



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

them a reason to contact the decision-makers for help, which they are likely to give on such occasions. People of different ages and from all social groups are invited to take part in the event, and this face-to-face contact helps the decision-makers to gain a positive feeling for the ambitions of these young people.

Picnics, Lukasz thinks could be a popular method in all countries. They can also be varied in many ways and have different themes such as "European Picnics" or "Picnics with European Funds", in order to incorporate some ideas and input from European sources. The project is a way of working with youth participation because it is a good opportunity for young people to do something, not only for themselves, but also for society. It is also good to have cooperation among young people, decision-makers, entrepreneurs and other regional actors.

2. Piteå, Sweden: Monica is a youth coordinator employed by the municipality of Piteå. The most successful initiative for youth participation in her context is "a Bag of Money", a project that meets young people on their own terms. Funds are made available for young people between thirteen and twenty years of age that can be used for any activities, such as building skateboard ramps, arranging concerts or setting up LAN events. The idea for such an activity must come from the young people themselves and there should be a maximum period of seven days between the application and the decision to grant financial support. As a youth coordinator, Monica acts as an advisor during the entire process and provides a source of positive energy for the young people. She also helps them get the right tools with which to implement the project. Fast access to information is as important as making communication as easy as possible. The use of the Internet, mobile phones and SMSs, as well as personal meetings, is crucial to Monica's work.

Monica thinks that young people are attracted by the possibility of being responsible for a budget of their own that can be spent quite independently, as well as by the educational arrangements that receive a lot of help and support when needed. The "Bag of

Money" initiative has been given an award by the local business community for best practice. Their decision to do so contains the following justification:

"To dare to change the track and test new ideas requires courage. It also requires the boldness to acknowledge one's shortcomings and the need for development. Piteå municipality has done all of this and this initiative has quickly established itself as a model for other municipalities throughout the country. "

For further details please refer to:

www.pitea.se/ung

3. Donegal, Ireland: Kellie works as a youth coordinator with Donegal Youth Council. She took part in organizing an "Agenda Day" in a town called Letterkenny, together with seven other councillors. This brought together eighty young people and thirty decision-makers in order to discuss four main issues affecting young people in the area. The issues of interest at the time were anti-social behaviour, "the mosquito" (a high-frequency device that emits a terrible noise to prevent young people gathering in the "wrong" places), facilities, and discrimination. The councillors themselves chose the venue, the food, the programme, sent out invitations, and along with young people they worked as facilitators and took minutes on the day's activities. The event was jointly chaired by a youth councillor and the chair of the Joint Policing Committee.

The day began with speakers from the community, both young and old, and with presentations by the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Youth Information Centre on "the mosquito", and a foreign student at the local college, who came to study in the town. After the presentations, round-table discussions started on the subjects in question. The young people held their own session and the adults held their discussions in another room. At the close they gathered together for joint discussions.



photo: Lukasz Hajduk

Everything discussed during the day was noted down and all participants received their own copy of the document. It was also presented at the Local Electoral Area Meeting. The outcome of this "Agenda Day" is still being used in dealing with youth issues in the area.

If you want to know more about this project from Donegal, further details can be found on:

www.donegalyouthcouncil.ie

Success factors

Reasons why success is sometimes elusive

The participants spent a lot of time examining the settings that were crucial in giving a project or an activity a fair degree of youth influence. This was a unique opportunity and a chance for the experts from sixteen countries to discuss their work, express their worries and identify success factors in the light of their national contexts, but under a European umbrella.

To identify practices that work in general is, of course, not easy, but there are not really any national success factors that cannot be transferred to another country. It is really a matter of development, information and hard work. And last, but not least, good will among decision-makers.

The easy way that works everywhere

These experienced youth workers highlighted the following five success factors that make it easier to guarantee participation and give young people a chance to gain power.

1. Knowledge-based decisions. To have knowledge about young people and their needs is essential. For this to work you must undertake valid studies and authoritative surveys and collect information about different groups of young people so that the vast majority find themselves represented. To bridge inequality among young people and to give them the best conditions you have to know who they are, both as individuals and as a group.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

2. Take young people seriously. People grow when given responsibility. Do not take it for granted that young people have less experience. They might have other ways of dealing with problems and tackling challenges but they find their own way. Dare to relinquish control and risk something to show trust through letting people take charge of their situation. There must be room for failure and a second chance. Anyone who feels powerless becomes paralyzed and subjugated but flourishes in an encouraging and generous environment. This applies to everyone but especially to the young.

3. Encouragement. Young people with initiative should be encouraged as much as possible. Let them know that you are there for them and wait until you are asked to contribute. Your positive feedback, encouragement and support are important to make young people grow as individuals.

4. Flexibility. It is easy to seek patterns and structures to make your surrounding understandable, but there is no single model that suits and describes all young people. It is important to be able to adapt an activity to individuals and groups. Young people are really not a homogeneous group.

5. Immediate Response. Decisions relating to youth projects should not be put off. Young people's interests come and go and they may become impatient. Therefore it is important to give a fast response right here, right now!



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

List of methods shared at the seminar

During the seminar participants shared many methods used to get young people to participate in local society, which might provide useful inspiration for anyone working with young people. In order to identify different methods, they are here divided into four groups but the majority of the projects fit into at least two of the groups. Participatory budgets do not rule out coaching, quite the opposite, and contact with decision-makers can, of course, be combined with all the other points. These methods facilitate youth influence and have been successful in various places in Europe. Most of the methods might be copied and used anywhere, some of them are there to provide inspiration and to get everyone to reflect upon their own situation and develop ways that suit the structure of the local society.

Coaching and support

"To increase the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood among young people is good"

(Laura, Italy)

Coaching as a method can mean a lot of things. A youth leader almost always has a coaching role. It is in the very nature of an adult person working with young people to encourage them and help out. For real support, however, something more is needed. One common method of strengthening the individual is empowerment. This means that youth workers do not restrict themselves to helping and encouraging, but contribute to the strengthening of the individual in the deepest sense. Empowerment⁷ is a key word that leads to the opposite of oppression and mistrust.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

- A youth leader should be aware, well informed and equipped with the right tools, which constitute important links between young people and decision-makers. Youth leaders need training and support to develop and feel secure in their role. One cost-effective way is for local government to support discussions and face-to-face meetings between youth leaders from different municipalities or regions. The objective would be to share methods and to provide each other with inspiration as well as new ideas.

- Involve youth directly and in all steps in the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of a project. This is a way to let young people take charge and influence the process.

- Facilitate participation of young people by supporting informal groups that develop spontaneously. In this way you take advantage of the interests of young people and meet them on their own terms.

- Peer-to-peer or friend support, is a great way to spread the word and deliver a message in a language that fits the target group. Give youth access to a space for this purpose. A place where they can spend time and talk about worries and problems that they do not want to share with adults.

- Arrange a student council on which all the schools in the area are represented, so that students can talk about current issues and arrange workshops on a peer-to-peer basis.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Outreach

"I work in a local NGO and contact young people in youth clubs and give them information about activities and projects"

(Natalie, Luxemburg)

Outreach in this context means two different things. Firstly, it targets the importance of information on activities, programmes and opportunities reaching all young people, not only those already organized. Secondly, it ensures that young people attract the attention of decision-makers and politicians through their views, concerns and suggestions.

The importance of information

- Identify the target groups by analysing their needs, where they are and what they like. Find the places where your target groups get together and ask if you can attend and present your information.
- Arrange sport activities, concerts, theatre plays or picnics and combine them with information about young people's rights or opportunities available to them within the community.
- Make sure all young people have access to the Internet in youth clubs, libraries or public centres.
- Use those communication tools that you know your target group uses when making contact with them, such as e-mail and SMSs.
- Make sure that you empower young people outside the circle of already committed and active youngsters. Cooperating with schools is one way to make contact with the youngsters who need empowerment the most.
- Provide technical tools for a digital meeting place on Internet. This means that young people can be creative anywhere by publishing their lyrics, art or photos from wherever a computer is located.

- Delegate responsibilities and let everyone contribute. For example this can be done through arranging a show or a play. Include music, the theatre and dancing. Let everyone contribute; someone has to write the play, someone has to compose the music and play it, make the clothes, paint the scenery, make the props, and someone has to promote the event. Create groups for each area. Let the young people involved make contact with local businesses and ask for their sponsorship.

Attract attention

- Make it easy for the youngsters to reach adults for supervision or advice by having an "all-hours" open office, a phone number to call, a person to meet and a website to send questions to with a twenty-four-hour guaranteed response time.
- Offer some space: places to meet such as youth clubs, sport arenas, coffee shops, places to hold debates, cultural events and workshops for carpentry, painting, handicrafts etc.
- Offer study circles or workshops on things that interest young people. Even better, let the youngsters come up with the topics themselves and take charge of the agenda and let them know you will be there to support them.
- Arrange meetings across the generations. For example, let younger and older children meet in a joint graffiti project or let teenagers teach elderly people about computers and the Internet. Maybe the elderly can help them with their homework in return.
- Arrange meetings between young people from different parts of the city. Let them speak about their own conditions, compare them with each other, and discuss society from their own perspective.

- Gather leaders from various youth organizations and organize a special day for all children and youngsters who are members of a youth movement in the region. They could organize activities, games, and entertainment for the participants in the city centre with the aim to raise the standing and reputation of local youth movements. This would be a unique day because all the different youth movements would come together, and during the preparations for this day the leaders would meet to share information and ideas.
- Engage a Forum Theatre group and make it possible for all the young people in the region to be among the audience. Forum Theatre is a method of making the audience react and to assume the role of the actors so as to change the scene and resolve situations. The audience is encouraged to reflect collectively on the suggested changes and thus become empowered to generate social action. This is also called the Theatre of the Oppressed and was pioneered by Augusto Boal in 1979:
www.theatreoftheoppressed.org
- Use street theatre as a method of letting young people spread their ideas, thoughts and opinions. Suggest they improvise scenes dealing with local political issues. Make sure that you listen carefully and follow up important issues in discussions and debates.

Contact with decision-makers

"Enthusiastic politicians are a success factor in itself"
(Rutger, Holland)

Most people do not have a natural contact with those who make the decisions, which is particularly true in the case of young people. It is therefore essential that they get a chance to meet with those whose decisions affect their lives. Furthermore, it is preferably that they themselves take an active part in such decision-making.

As a youth worker you can help by:

- Mediating between young people and decision-makers and informing the politicians on how to approach the youngsters and vice versa.
- Establish a good basis for youth participation within your organization by making the benefits clear.
- Creating an "open channel" between young people and decision-makers so that the former understand the principles of democracy and the latter encourage active participation.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

- Arrange debates; first at a regional level and then hold a national youth debate at the parliament. Include people from as many areas and groups as possible.
- Provide a post box or a digital forum in places where young people hang around. When they have a thought or an idea they can jot it down. Such messages are collected regularly and sent to local decision-makers.
- Invite local politicians to visit your youth club. Make sure they know that every party will be invited, and that young people are the voters of the future. If the politicians do not show up, make sure to let them (and the press) know that you are dissatisfied. Remember that you will need to be prepared, so have interesting and relevant questions ready.

Participatory budgets

"We have found that having both personnel and a sufficient budget allows good work to be undertaken, while the young people are empowered to move forward their own projects."

(Kellie, Ireland)

To allow young people to be in control of money is a challenging thought for a lot of local politicians in Europe, who want to know that they will not mismanage this task. It has been proven that this kind of project, which involves a high level of budgetary responsibility, has been successful. Here are some examples of how to introduce participatory budget in a local context.

- Make young people participate in the project from the very beginning and involve them in earning the money needed. Introduce a system where the local municipality contributes half the sum and the youngsters raise the other half themselves.

- "A Bag of Money" is a way of supporting youth initiatives that has been tried with good results. It gives young people an opportunity to apply for money for any project that stands a decent chance of getting started within a short period of time and they have to wait a maximum of seven days for a decision.
- Young people should be able to apply for money to implement their youth project. How this is arranged differ depending on the organisation of the local structure in European countries. One way could be to channel the process through a local NGO that could help youth to make contact with the decision-makers as well as apply for money. Another way could be to apply directly to the local authority and so shorten the time from the idea to the finished project.
- Local youth services should draw up a youth policy plan once a year that states the viewpoint and mission with regard to local youth work. Together with young people, the policy-makers have to adapt the youth work budget according to the youth policy plan. Concrete actions described in such a work plan address both short-and long-term objectives for youth participation at a local level.



And remember!

- Listen to youth initiatives; do not try to impose your ideas on young people!
- Meeting in person is important!
- Take young people seriously! Do not pretend and do not lie. They will always detect a fake!
- The process is as important as its results. Participation is a learning process and each generation must re-acquire representative democracy!
- Participation takes time but doesn't necessarily cost money!
- Responsibility leads to social awareness!
- Give respect and you will get respect in return!
- Allow room for mistakes!

The European structures and ways to youth influence

The White Paper, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the European Youth Pact are three major foundations that have been making an impact on European Youth Policy since 2001. In April 2009, the European Commission released a document on youth policy work in the years to come. Our seminar was based on these aspects and aspired to deliver methods of best practice to meet future challenges. At the seminar, participants shared their own experiences and viable practices with regard to various ways of dealing with youth influence.

One Europe - different countries - different levels

In some countries, youth policy sector is very well defined in relation to others, with its own government departments, legislation and administration. In others, youth policy is fragmented among a number of sectors (education, care, culture, health etc), while there are also countries where there is virtually no youth policy sector at all, that is to say, there is no officially established organization for this work.

In Poland the idea of regarding young people as a particular group in need of a specific policy is a new one and so far youth issues have been handled the same way as those relating to other citizens, and there is no special policy for young people. However, a Youth Council (PRM) was set up in 2003 as a national umbrella platform for cooperation among major nationwide youth organisations. PRM is an independent initiative that has not yet been officially recognized by state structures.

In practice there is a major degree of regional autonomy in Italian politics and youth policy is based on several local realities. A national youth council exists in Italy (Forum Nazionale dei Giovani), which also represents Italian youth on the European Youth Forum. However, the council has not been established through national legislation but is instead a private organization partly funded by the Italian government.

The Italian national youth council is not very visible among the majority of young people, as it works mainly with youth associations/organizations at national level (the rate of participation by young people in youth associations is less than 5%).

In 2006 a Minister of Youth Policies and Sport Activities was appointed in Italy. The present government altered the name to the Minister of Youth. The Minister is responsible for coordinating government activities so as to guarantee the implementation of policies for youth in every sphere, such as the economy, work, education and culture.



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The Minister's other duties are to supervise the Italian National Agency of the EU Youth in Action programme and to participate in the work of the national youth forum.

Characteristics of the Swedish youth policy⁸

It is hard to make direct comparisons between countries because of the differences between the target groups for youth policy, the dominant view of young people, and the way in which youth policy is organised. However, five tendencies can be seen when Swedish youth policy is compared to that of many other European countries.

Firstly, Swedish youth policy is characterised by being aimed primarily at young people between thirteen and twenty-five years of age, and by the fact that it differentiates between children and young people. Another characteristic is that Swedish youth policy is broader than that of many other countries, in that it includes many different areas and is cross-sectoral. Welfare issues have a natural place in Swedish youth policy, not just club activities and educational issues. Thirdly, we can see that Swedish youth policy bears clear signs of postwar Scandinavian welfare policy. This is a universalist policy, intended to give all young people the opportunity to establish themselves as independent adults. In many other countries, youth policy applies to certain groups who are considered in need of special initiatives. However, a shift of perspective can be seen in Swedish youth policy, as the government and the Swedish parliament now more clearly emphasize that these initiatives should specifically include disadvantaged young people. A fourth characteristic of Swedish youth policy is the willingness to see young people as a resource, which affects how the policy is framed. Instead of seeing youth as a problematic period full of dangers which young people must navigate as best they can, Swedish youth policy emphasises that this phase of life has an inherent value. The initiatives prioritised are primarily those that can support young people in their own choices, combined



with ones for especially vulnerable groups, such as young people who are outside the labour market or live in high-risk environments. A fifth characteristic of Swedish youth policy is that there is a youth minister and national goals for youth policy. Sweden also has a state agency, The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, which is responsible for coordinating and following up national youth policy. However, the autonomy of the Swedish municipalities means that Swedish youth policy cannot be controlled by the state. If they wish, the individual municipalities can base their work on the national goals for youth policy work, but the final shape of youth policy is decided by them.

The Future EU Cooperation in the Youth Field

The efforts relating to a coordinated European Youth policy were evaluated by the Member States in December 2008. At the end of April 2009 the Commission delivered a paper containing general conclusions as to what the new European Youth policy should comprise. During the Czech EU Presidency, youth issues were discussed and the foundations of the new European youth policy was signed by the Ministers of Youth during the Swedish Presidency in November 2009⁹.

EU cooperation in the youth field has strengthened since the European Commission published the White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" in 2001. This is the policy document that was used to define future community activities in the field of youth in Europe. It made it easier to identify a structured platform for young people and for policy-makers to meet and draft resolutions, such as those on the participation and social inclusion of young people.

EU youth policies aim to meet young people's changing expectations while encouraging them to contribute to society. Up until December 2008 this cooperation was based on three areas of activity:



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

- Youth Active Citizenship through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which is based on four common objectives:
 1. Participation of young people,
 2. Information to young people,
 3. Voluntary activity among young people and
 4. Better knowledge of young people
- Mainstreaming of a youth perspective in other policy areas.
- Social and occupation integration through the implementation of The European Youth Pact, which was adopted by the European Council in 2005, as part of the Lisbon Strategy. The main objective of the Youth Pact is to improve school education and vocational training, mobility, the integration of young people into the workplace, and social inclusion. At the same time, the purpose is for young people to reconcile work and family life.

Youth Participation is on the political agenda and it aims to encourage young people to become active citizens by playing an active role in either the civic life of their community or the structures of representative democracy. This policy work is supported by concrete action in the form of a programme for young people called Youth in Action¹⁰ (YIA).



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Resources - the tool box

Various tools can be used to work in the direction that matches the intention of giving young people real influence within society. At a local or municipal level a youth council might be considered such a tool, as the structure in itself allows and encourages participation, which is essential. Within a region a recurrent youth forum for meeting and exchanging ideas is another kind of tool. Action plans and surveys are also useful in efforts to get young people to participate in, and make an impact on, society. However, there is also help available from the international arena. Here are some tools that might be useful as a source of inspiration and in finding good examples and contacts for advice.



photo: Lukasz Hajduk



- **The Youth Partnership web portal**

The Council of Europe and the European Commission have developed cooperation in the youth field in an attempt to find synergies. Here you can find information aimed at both young people and youth workers in the area of youth policy and youth research:

<http://youth-partnership.coe.int/youth-partnership/>

- **European Youth Forum**

It works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives, by representing and advocating their needs and interests and those of their organisations with respect to European Institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. National and local/regional youth fora can be established where young people can meet in youth councils. These exist at local, state, provincial, regional, national, and international levels among governments, NGOs, schools, and other entities. The young people meet on a regular basis with the elected representatives for their region. For further details of how to proceed and where to get support, please refer to:

www.youthforum.org/

- **European Youth Parliament**

The EYP is an international, non-partisan organization that seeks to increase young people's awareness of European issues, and provide a truly unique educational experience. The core of EYP's activities is the three nine-day international Youth Parliament sessions which bring together 250 to 300 students and teachers from all over Europe. For links to youth parliaments in different countries, please refer to:

www.eypej.org/



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

• A common platform

This could be a local action plan or a child or youth plan in a region or even an entire country, and it is an important tool for everyone concerned with putting such matters into practice. It will strengthen the role of young people in society and it is thus important to formulate a vision. Such a platform could be based on UN principles and the young people themselves should play their role in formulating the vision or the plan. More details of how to start your own organisation with an independent United Nations perspective can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/>

• Surveys

A first step in developing a local youth policy is to acquire an accurate knowledge of what your target group want or think that they want, and it is important to gather this information in order to set measurable objectives. To see your results in a perspective that will enable you to draw conclusions about the effects of the local youth policy, the survey should be repeated at regular intervals.

LUPP (Local follow-up of youth policy) has been a successful way of improving Swedish youth policy and it takes the form of a well-prepared survey that is divided into different modules:

Leisure, School, Politics and Power, Security, Health, Work and Future. The survey has formed the core of a model for following up and developing a knowledge-based municipal youth policy in Sweden. Aided by the knowledge gained from the survey, politicians and officials are able to set up measurable targets for municipal activities. Further details of this can be found at:

http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/english_art/0,2683,6784,00.html

- **The European Charter on the Participation of Young People**

The revised Charter is a tool for supporting young people, youth workers, organisations and local authorities in promoting and enhancing meaningful youth participation at a local level across Europe. There are different ways of using this document. Some users might choose to implement it as it is, others might need to receive some support in order to gain inspiration and learn how to make the best use of the revised Charter in their own context.

www.youthparticipation.org/index.aspx

- **UNESCO**

Since 1998, the youth section of UNSECO has been charged with providing an impetus and coherence for UNESCO's work with, and on behalf of, young people. These efforts benefit from direct communication with youngsters through a wide network of associations and Youth NGOs and also from its active participation in numerous youth events and the "Internal Priority Youth Committee". Please refer to:

http://portal.unesco.org/shs/enev.phpURL_ID=10993&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

- **Youth coordinators**

Persons usually employed by the local authority and municipality with a mission to coordinate youth and support initiatives. Their task includes having an overview and a strong network, which can be used to make things happen more easily.

- **SALTO-YOUTH**

Stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities and comprises a network of eight Resource Centres working on priority areas within the youth field in Europe. It provides youth work and training resources and organises training and contact-making activities in order to support organisations, youth workers and national agencies responsible for the implementation of the European Youth in Action Programme.

Furthermore, SALTO-YOUTH compiles many kinds of documentation, resources and information, as the name "Resource Centres" implies, and supplies them to the appropriate clients and users who need them. Please refer to:

www.salto-youth.net

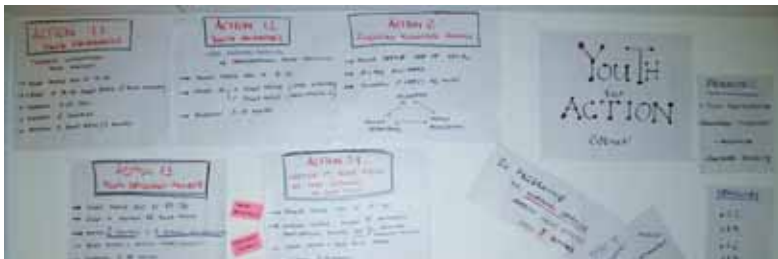


photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Where to find financial support

The European social fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund, created in 1957, is the main EU financial instrument for investing in people through supporting employment and enhancing their education and skills, thus improving their job prospects. Member States and regions devise their own ESF Operational Programmes in order to respond to the real needs at a local level. Please refer to:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm

Be the Change! Small Scale grants for Youth-led Projects

Peace Child International has created the "Be the Change" Programme to support young people in becoming involved in local community action and development projects. This aims to encourage young people to "Be the Change" they want to see in their communities and to make it possible a small-scale grant programme for youth-led projects has been established.

Please refer to:

www.peacechild.org/btc

The European Youth Foundation (EYF)

EYF is a fund established by the Council of Europe to provide financial support for European youth activities.

Its purpose is to encourage co-operation among young people in Europe by providing financial support to such European youth activities which serve the promotion of peace, understanding and co-operation in a spirit of respect for the Council of Europe's fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, tolerance and solidarity. Please refer to:

<http://www.eyf.coe.int/fej>

YouthActionNet Global Fellowship Programme

Each year YouthActionNet gives support to exceptional young social entrepreneurs who, through their emerging projects, promote social change and link youth to local communities, or who lead a team of dedicated young people in protecting and promoting the rights of children in their country.

YouthActionNet supports youth leadership development through its global and national Fellowship programmes throughout the world. Please refer to:

www.youthactionnet.org



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The Youth in Action programme (YIA)

The Youth in Action programme is the EU programme for young people. The aim is to inspire active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and involve them in creating the future of the union. It promotes mobility within and outside EU borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and it encourages young people to participate, regardless of education or social and cultural backgrounds. Please refer to:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm



photo: Lukasz Hajduk

With a total budget of 885 million Euros over seven years (2007–2013), the Programme supports a large variety of activities for young people and youth workers through different measures. Here follows a short description of a few of them that have a bearing on youth participation.

Action 1.2 Youth Initiatives

Youth Initiatives are projects entirely devised, planned and implemented by young people at a local, regional or national level. The goal of these important non-formal learning experiences is to stimulate young people's creativity, enterprise and initiative. Youth Initiatives are aimed primarily at the



photo: Lukasz Hajduk



eighteen to thirty age group, but those aged between fifteen and eighteen can take part if accompanied by a coach or youth worker. There are two types of initiative: National Youth Initiatives, which are developed by single groups in their own countries; and Transnational Youth Initiatives that involve two or more groups from different European countries. The topics that groups choose to work on must be relevant to the young people themselves and to the local community.

Action 1.3 Youth Democracy Projects

Youth Democracy Projects aim at boosting young people's involvement in the democratic process at a local, regional and European level. The objective is to provide young people with ideas about, and experiences of, democracy, and to inspire new national and transnational networks and exchanges of good practice. Youth Democracy Projects improve young people's understanding of how democracy works, helping them to make the most of their right to participate in the decision-making structures of a democratic society. Among other things, projects can aim at developing measures to support a structured dialogue between decision-makers and young people.

Action 5.1 Meetings between young people and those responsible for youth policy

The aim of this sub-measure is to promote European cooperation in the youth field by encouraging structured dialogue between policy-makers and young people. It supports cooperation between young people and decision-makers and offers concrete support for youth policy development at a European level. This includes those youth events organised at a local, regional, national and international level.

For reading and further inspiration



“Ideas for Inclusion and Diversity” is the SALTO inclusion educational booklet for youth workers who intend to take young people with limited opportunities abroad for the first time (the socioeconomically disadvantaged).

Download it free of charge at:

www.salto-youth.net/IDBooklet/



“Coaching Guide” is the SALTO Participation guide and it is an attempt to come to a common understanding on how to provide support and advice to groups of young people who run youth initiative projects and thus support youth

participation. Download it free of charge at:

www.salto-youth.net/Participationpublications/



“Go International” is a brochure about different experiences of international co-operation in the youth field. Based on an evaluation undertaken by the Swedish National

Board for Youth Affairs the collaboration described can inspire new, exciting projects, both at home and further afield. It provides an insight into four Swedish municipalities that have successfully incorporated an international dimension into their youth work. Download it free of charge at:

www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/english_kat/0,2685,941,00.html



“Creating meetings” is a booklet of methods for arranging meetings between young people and decision-makers where the participants really do meet. These methods can be used by young people, youth leaders, decision-makers, and anyone else who works with youth issues.

Download it free of charge at:

www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/english_kat/0,2685,941,00.html



“Put your imprint on society” is a booklet on Action 1.3 Youth Democracy Projects. Based on the activities developed by SALTO-YOUTH Participation Resource Centres since 2007, this publication aims to define what a Youth Democracy Project is and provides examples of projects implemented and tips on how to support their implementation. Download it free of charge at:
www.salto-youth.net/Participationpublications/



“Have your say!” is a manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (21 May 2003). The Council of Europe designed this booklet as a tool for supporting young people, youth workers, organisations and local authorities in promoting and enhancing meaningful youth participation at local levels across Europe. Download it for free or buy your copy at:
http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&=EN&produit_aliasid=2303

“White Paper on Youth” In 2001, the Commission launched a White Paper on Youth, which laid the basis for increased European cooperation in four youth priority areas: participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of young people. The White Paper also proposed taking the youth dimension more into account in cross-sector politics. Download it free of charge at:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/youth/c11055_en.htm



“What works in youth participation”, in 2002 the International Youth Foundation published a book containing nine case studies written by authors of different ages, nationalities and perspectives. The book often provides new angles on which to reflect and is written for practitioners and policy-makers alike. Download it free of charge at:
www.iyfnet.org/uploads/ACFE90.pdf

Sweden

UN Children's rights!

National Youth Policy

Local Youth policies

Regional Youth policies

NATIONAL BOARD OF YOUTH AFFAIRS

- Support
- NBOX A
 - National networks
 - Regional networks
 - Local networks
 - Personal networks

Methods

- Local youth councils
- Local surveys/questionnaires (LWPP)
- Bag of money, Money-Emergency, Fast money, I have a dream!
- Youthculture centres
- open channel
- Meetings between youth and politicians
- associations

Traditions/values

Associations - national and local economic support

Pupils councils and Class councils

Funny-Hour on Friday in school 😊

Law against child abuse

Gender equality

opportunities to feel as an important person from young age

photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The cooperation

The seminar in Jönköping was an initiative of The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs in cooperation with the SALTO-YOUTH Participation Resource Centre and the Municipality of Jönköping. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is a public authority under the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality. One of its missions is to support municipalities in implementing Swedish youth policy, which has been developed over a long period of time, i.e., since the 1950s. In autumn 2004 the Swedish Parliament ¹¹passed a bill, "Makt att bestämma - rätt till välfärd (Power to decide - right to welfare)" containing two overarching goals for national youth policy, i.e., that "*Young people should have real access to influence and welfare*". These goals are aimed at young people being able to affect the development of society in general as well as their own lives and their local environment. This includes being able to influence aspects of their everyday lives, such as their home, school and work environment, their circle of friends and their family. However, they should also be able to influence society's priorities. Young people should have influence because it is a right in itself, but also because their knowledge and experiences are valuable resources for society¹².



photo: Lukasz Hajduk



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Sweden's report to the European Commission on EU cooperation in the youth field, 2008-11-28, Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, Division for Youth Policy and Non-Governmental Organisations

www.se2009.eu/youth

- Official website for the Swedish Presidency of the European Union where you can follow the process creating a Future EU Cooperation in the Youth Field

www.salto-youth.net/Participation/courses/

- where you can find the educator's report from the seminar in Jönköping 16–20 March 2009

www.eurodesk.eu

Web pages

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm

www.salto-youth.net/

www.eyp.org

www.unesco.org/youth

www.youthforum.org



photo: The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Footnotes

¹ The White Paper on youth will be explained under the heading *The Future EU Cooperation in the Youth Field*.

² The open method of coordination was adopted by the European Council in 2002 and calls in particular on the Council to establish the common objectives and a timetable for follow-up reports from the Member States for each priority. It also stresses that the policies and initiatives that affect young people at both a national and a European level take into consideration matters such as their needs, situation, living conditions and expectations. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries_education_training_youth/youth/c11055_en.htm

³ The Youth Pact, adopted by the European Council in 2005, aims to promote the participation of all young people in education, employment and society. With the European Youth Pact, the concerns of young people regarding their social and professional integration are taken into account and integrated in other European policies, particularly in the Lisbon Strategy. The European Youth Pact aims to facilitate the transition between education and employment, a transition which is becoming longer and more difficult for today's young people. These measures are aimed at improving the level of education and training, at providing support in their first job and at improving the quality of the jobs done by young people, as well as achieving a better match between professional and private life.

⁴ The revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, May 2003.

⁵ Real influence demands a significant level of responsibility for each and every individual in society but it is difficult to call up on this demand being valid also for under-aged people.

⁶ The Convention on the Rights of the Child – article 12. www.unicef.org

⁷ Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities and often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capabilities.

⁸ From *Youth and youth policy – a Swedish perspective* by Inger Ashing, in Introduction to Youth Policy – Swedish and Turkish Perspectives 2009, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

⁹ Follow the process at www.eu2009.se/youth and see the results on www.ec.europa.eu/youth

¹⁰ Youth in Action http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm

¹¹ The Swedish Parliament is called the Riksdag www.riksdagen.se

¹² From *Youth and youth policy – a Swedish perspective* by Inger Ashing, in Introduction to Youth Policy – Swedish and Turkish Perspectives 2009, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

Youth Influence **The Real Deal**

Young people are a resource in our society. Their knowledge, experiences and values are precious. In recent years a growing number of European, national, regional and local initiatives strengthening young people's participation have emerged. But we still have a long way to go.

This booklet is the result of a joint venture, a seminar, between the Swedish National Agency for the Youth in Action Programme, SALTO-YOUTH Participation Resource Centre and the Swedish municipality of Jönköping. The seminar was entitled "Youth Influence at local level". Youth workers from sixteen European countries shared good practice on how to implement methods of youth influence within different national structures and political frameworks.

Use this booklet when looking for ideas and inspiration, when seeking to find financial support, understanding the political framework or if you just are curious about knowing how different countries are working with youth influence. We hope this booklet inspires you to leave your footprints in society.

www.salto-youth.net

www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/publications



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www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se

