

YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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Abstract: This paper presents the main results of the research titled Youth Work and Youth Policy at the Local Level, which was conducted by the Youth Network Institute MaMa on the initiative of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth within the framework of preparations for the National Programme on Youth. Different sources on the youth structure, dispersion, financing and integration at the local level were primarily analyzed within the framework of the research and based on the data obtained, a comprehensive analysis on youth work and youth policy at the local level in Slovenia was produced for the current situation.

Key words: *youth work, youth policy, youth, youth organization, local community*

MLADINSKO DELO IN MLADINSKA POLITIKA NA LOKALNI RAVNI

Povzetek: V članku so predstavljeni glavni izsledki raziskave Mladinsko delo in mladinska politika na lokalni ravni, raziskave, ki jo je v letu 2010 izvedel Zavod Mladinska mreža MaMa na pobudo Urada RS za mladino v okviru priprave Nacionalnega programa za mladino. V okviru raziskave so bili analizirani predvsem različni viri o mladinski strukturi, razprešenosti, financiranju in povezovanju na lokalni ravni, na podlagi pridobljenih podatkov pa je bila izdelana celovita analiza stanja mladinskega dela in mladinske politike na lokalni ravni v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: *mladinsko delo, mladinska politika, mladina, mladinska organizacija, lokalna skupnost*

1. Introduction

National umbrella legislation was adopted in Slovenia in 2010, which defines the youth sector and establishes the public interest in the youth sector - *Act on the Public Interest in Youth Sector*. Until then, the local communities were obliged to regulate the systemic level of the youth field with different local documents (i.e. decrees, regulations). Only two laws were used for the youth sector field until 2010, which regulated specific areas: *Youth Councils Act* (sphere of activity: activities and funding the National Youth Council and Local Community Youth Councils) and the *Students Association Act* (sphere of activity and student activities). However, there are also about 40 laws that are indirectly linked within the framework of Slovenian legislation regarding youth, which refer to the youth under various statutory provisions.

Since its inception (October 1991), The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth has published seven very different national youth studies regarding content and methodology, with which it has gained an insight into the different areas that affect young people (e.g. organization, education, employment, unemployment, healthcare...):

- *The Future of the Youth*, 1995 (the result of a nation-wide research by the student youth - *Youth '93*)
- *Youth in the Nineties: Analysis of the Situation in Slovenia*, 1996 (National Report on Youth in Slovenia)
- *A Pause for the Student Youth*, 1996 (the book is based on the research *The Values and the Lifestyles of the Student Youth*, which is a continuation of the *Youth '93* research.
- *Social Vulnerability of Young People*, 2000 (the result of a nation-wide research on youth - *Youth '98*)
- *Youth 2000: Slovenian Youth at the Frontier of the Third Millennium*, 2002 (collection of scientific papers, in which the authors deal with the modified status of youth)
- *Between Childhood and Adulthood – An Analysis of the Position of Young People in Slovenia in 2009*, 2009 (collection of scientific papers, in which the authors present a situational analysis on the position of young people in different areas)
- *Youth in Slovenia*, 2009 (a comprehensive statistical overview of the position of young people in Slovenia).

In 2010, the adopted national umbrella legislation required the preparation and adoption of the *National Programme for Youth*, a basic programming document, which would define the priorities and measures for the youth sector in the public interest. This is why in 2010 the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth took the initiative to produce studies that will form the basis for the establishment of a national programme. This also includes the research titled Youth Work and Youth Policy at the Local Level, which was produced by the Youth Network Institute MaMa. The research represents an analysis of the situation recorded in 2010 with data collected in 2009.

2. Research Methodology

The data within the context of the research was obtained in several ways:

- through analysis and comparison of data from various written sources:
 - reports on co-financing, which the organizations in the field of youth work had submitted to the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth within the framework of the annual *Public Call for Co-financing Organizations in the Field of Youth Work 2009*
 - statistical data from the Statistics Office of the Republic of Slovenia
 - local tenders for co-financing youth activities
 - local ordinances, regulations and similar documents, which govern the youth field at the systemic level
- through data from various websites (websites of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, the Youth Council of Slovenia, Youth Information and Consultation Centre of Slovenia, Ljubljana Network of Information Points for Youth, Opening Space Youth Programme and various youth organizations)
- a questionnaire, which was sent to 210 municipalities in Slovenia and inquired about the systemic and financial management of the youth field in the municipality, youth research, infrastructure and informing the youth; 93 municipalities completed and returned the questionnaire, representing 44% of the total.
- A questionnaire or in-depth interviews with youth organization representatives and other organizations working with young people who are active at the local level.

3. Organization of Youth Sector

The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth is a body at the national level, which plans, organizes and implements measures in the field of youth policy and youth work. Through activities it allows young people to develop their potential, since it encourages the organization of young people and their participation in social processes, communication and consultation, mobility of young people and international co-operation. The Authority shall annually publish a public call for co-financing youth work, where organizations that have the status of a national youth organization, a youth centre, a youth council in a local community and the status of other non-governmental organizations can compete for funding. On the basis of a *Public call for acquiring the status of eligibility for co-financing organizations in the field of youth work for the period 2009-2012*, 168 organizations; 57 youth centres, 13 national youth organizations, 83 NGOs and 42 local community youth councils obtained the status in 2009. All the organizations that obtained the status were not co-financed, since all 13 national youth organizations, 55 youth centres, 62 other NGOs and 15 local community youth councils were financed based on the *Public call for acquiring the status of eligibility for co-financing organizations in the field of youth work 2009*, whereby they do not need to obtain the status of eligibility for co-financing in advance.

3.1. National Youth Organizations

National youth organizations are voluntary and non-governmental organizations, whereby most of the management and membership is represented by young people between the ages of 14 and 29 and are organized by having their units in the majority of statistical regions and therefore operate at a national level and have a larger number of members organized in local units of the organization. Their purpose is to represent and develop the interests of young people, perform youth work in accordance with the constitution of the organization and encourage young people to integrate and participate in society.

All 13 national youth organizations have a head office in Ljubljana. They differ in their legal and formal organization (8 clubs and 5 associations), according to their characteristics (3 education based Christian organizations, 6 political organizations – political youth sections – and 4 interest organizations that are focused on specific youth such as students, tourism, rural youth and scouts) and according to the activities they implement (the majority implement a political program for young people and in addition to this the organizations are also engaged with education, organizing events, publishing, consulting, communication...).

In 2009, The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth allocated 219,784 EUR for the operations of national youth organizations. On average, each national youth organization received less than 17,000 EUR, whereby the lowest contractual amount was just over 12,000 EUR and the highest was just under 27,000 EUR. The entire program for national youth organizations was estimated at a value of 1,033,217.08 EUR,

which means that the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth co-financed 21% of the program for national youth organizations. In addition to the funds designated by The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth for the operations of national youth organizations, they also received funding from different ministries, local sources, its own revenues, the contributions of users, donations and other sources. If we compare the revenues in which the national youth organizations obtained from their own sources or from profit on the market, we can see that with the exception of the Tourist Association of Slovenia, they all implement their programs in an enterprising fashion. In 2009, they obtained a total of 255,240.65 EUR, which on average represents 21,100 EUR for each national youth organization, whereby the lowest amount was 1,100 EUR and the highest amount was 97,100 EUR.

3.2. Youth Centres

Until the adoption of the national umbrella legislation, the field of activity by youth centres was defined within the framework of public tenders by The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth. The regularity of operations, the plurality of the program with several different activities, adequate infrastructure and location, competence and professionalism of management and external collaborators, the democratic organizational principle of management and support to related youth organizations were amongst the basic conditions, which defined what a youth centre is and what a youth centre is not.

Given the dispersion of youth centres across Slovenia, there are certain districts with a extremely high concentration of youth centres (Posavje Region) and areas where there are virtually no youth centres (North Gorenjska and North-west Savinja Region). According to the municipalities, there are more than four youth centres located only in one municipality (The Municipality of Maribor), one municipality, which has three youth centres (The Municipality of Ljubljana), one municipality with two youth centres and 52 municipalities with one youth centre each. Given the dispersion of youth centres, the eastern part of Slovenia has a much more developed youth sector than the western part of Slovenia.

The majority of youth centres are organized as an association or federation of associations (45%), followed by public institutions (42%) and the least of them are private institutions (13%).

In 2009, The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth distributed 570,680 EUR amongst youth centres for their activities, whereby each youth centre had received an average of approximately 10,600 EUR. On average, the percentage of the contract value amounted to 16% of the value of the registered program, although some received up to 37% of the registered program. All 53 youth centres implemented the program with a total amount of 5,134,465.24 EUR. Youth centres obtained additional revenues through different ministries, local sources, their own revenues and other sources. On average, private institutions generated the most own revenues (32,291 EUR, followed by clubs (19,464 EUR) and the least were generated by public institutions (14, 575 EUR).

Youth centres used the funds for implementing the club program (30%), informal education (18%), communication (14%), international activities (13%), voluntary activities (8%), co-ordination (7%) and other activities.

In 2006, The Municipality of Ljubljana Youth Office added the following to the already existing national system of youth centres: district youth centres. In 2009, three district youth centres were in operation in the Municipality of Ljubljana (Bežigrad, Zalog, Šiška). The mission of the district youth centres is to offer young people from the district communities a safe location, where they could meet and actively spend their free time in an organized manner.

3.3. Local Community Youth Councils

Local community youth councils are carriers of youth work and youth policy at the local level and provide the basis for youth participation in local communities. Since the adoption of the *Youth Councils Act* in 2000, they are established in each local community as unifying and representative bodies of local youth organizations and local units of major youth organizations. Local community youth councils represent the interests of young people with local (municipal) authorities and discuss about the activities, funds and infrastructure, which will be allocated to young people. Furthermore, they have the right to express their opinions in accordance with the law, in all matters covered by municipal bodies that affect young people. With its operations, they promote the activities of youth organizations, provide their members and the wider public with information on the policy of the local community, especially in areas concerning young people.

Local community youth councils unite youth organizations at the local level, which at the same time may also be the founders of the local community youth council. Many municipalities do not have local community youth councils but they do have very active youth organizations, while some municipalities have two local community youth councils registered; The Municipalities of Celje, Radovljica, Maribor and Krško.

In 2009, there were 42 local community youth councils registered and The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth co-financed 15 programs, which amounts to almost 36% of all registered local community youth

councils and 14,982 EUR were distributed amongst them, which on average amounts to around 1,000 EUR for each local community youth council. Local community youth councils, receive the majority of other funds from local communities.

3.4. Other NGOs

Other non-governmental organizations are non-governmental, non-profit and volunteer organizations, which do not fall into any of the three groups mentioned above and implement activities for young people at the national or local level.

In 2009, The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth co-financed the program of 62 non-governmental organizations of which 39 have a head office in Ljubljana. 458,668.50 EUR was distributed to other non-governmental organizations. On average, each other non-governmental organization received 7,900 EUR.

Other non-governmental organizations allocated the most funds to the implementation of the club program, informal education, communication and consultation for young people and to the international project.

4. Instruments for the Support of Youth Work

Under the term instruments for the support of youth work, the research defines various measures, programs, strategies and initiatives for implementing youth work activities, which are divided into four instruments based on an analysis of questionnaires, through which municipalities create youth work in the local community:

- research on youth in their local environment
- preparation of a long-term strategy on youth
- the establishment of a public institution in the field of youth or the implementation of a special sector within the scope of social activities for young people
- public tenders, which target young people, youth organizations or organizations, which also include young people as an independent category in their operations.

4.1. Research on Youth in their Local Environment

The study showed that 22.4% of the municipalities perform local research on the youth. The studies are very different from one another, since some deal with youth as a whole, some research only one segment of young people or young people are included in the larger study as a special category. Municipalities most often address the following topics within the framework of the research:

- youth drug addiction
- youth leisure time
- a snapshot of the behavioural risk of young people
- education and career paths of young people
- needs analysis for a concrete project
- analysis of the work of public institutions
- young people in cross-border areas

The research providers are different, whereby 31% are youth centres, 17% are youth at school, 14% are different associations, 14% are institutes and the rest of the percentages are institutions, municipalities and LAS to a lesser extent. The research showed that municipalities, which do not have youth centres established, perform the research on their own or outsource it. Municipalities, which have youth centres established, leave the implementation of the research (or even expect it) to the youth centre.

Further research indicated that there is a correlation between the existing youth structure and the implementation of research on young people. Only 13% of the municipalities researched young people in municipalities where the youth structure is not developed. The interested public (local action group, various associations and non-youth associations) and external researchers (institutes and other public and private institutions) overtook the research in these municipalities or the municipalities performed the research themselves. 46% of the municipalities researched the young people where the youth structure is most developed of which the majority are youth centres and local community youth councils.

From the data we can see that the research of young people is really present and is implemented with the assistance of different actors and for different needs. However, they are not unified in which they could serve as a database for national needs.

4.2. Local Youth Strategy

The research showed that municipalities fundamentally do not accept local youth strategies:

- since they are confronted with a small number of young people who move to other cities to study and become the “problem” of other municipalities
- since they leave the implementation of youth activities to different youth initiatives and by co-financing the associations they ensure minimal municipal participation or they establish a public institution, which is authorized to prepare a youth program and by doing so round off the youth theme.

In the questionnaire, 25 municipalities replied that they have “some concrete strategy” in the field of youth, which changes every 4-5 years on an annual basis or as needed. These strategies are understood quite diversely:

- 5 municipalities indicated that the strategy in the field of youth exists within the framework of other long term strategies of the municipality such as the social protection strategy in the municipality, in the development programs of the municipality or in the development program of the sporting infrastructure
- 5 municipalities indicated that they have a strategy in the field of youth with developed organizations for work with young people such as public institutions, youth centres or student organizations
- 6 municipalities indicated that they have a strategy in the area of youth in preparation for a future period of a few years or as a part of the development strategy of the municipality, etc.
- one municipality anticipates the establishment of a public institution youth centre within the framework of a strategy in the field of youth
- 1 municipality has adopted a proposal for the development of youth work in the municipality for the 2010-2013 period.

In most cases municipalities plan strategies whether in the context of other strategies or separate with youth organizations and schools and some also plan with unorganized young people, although interest amongst young people regarding such themes, as they say themselves, does not even exist in smaller municipalities. Furthermore, municipalities also enable young people to participate in the preparation of the strategy or other public affairs of the municipality in various ways: 19% through opportunities in giving initiatives, 14% through participation in different committees, 14% through participation in associations, 12% through membership in municipal councils, 10% through representatives on the public institution council and otherwise.

4.3. Public Youth Sector

Under the term “public youth sector” the research defines public institutions with the status of a youth centre from the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth or special municipal offices for youth.

In 2009, there were 25 public institutions with the status of a youth centre from the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth. In recent years, there has been an increase in the establishment of such institutions, which means that local decision makers understand this as being one of the most important (if not sole) objectives, on the basis of which the establishment of a public institution shall contribute to the development of the youth sector. According to the data supplied by the municipalities, it is evident that some municipalities hand over the research, strategic planning, supervision and the implementation of youth policy in general to these public institutions and actually do not deal with young people anymore. In the questionnaire, these municipalities recognized the public institutions (even one association, a youth centre and a development agency) as an organizational unit within the municipality, where the field of youth is addressed. In most municipalities, the field of youth is considered within the scope of a department or a committee for social activities or the public sector. In these municipalities, the youth centre is only a provider of youth programs and not a preparatory body for a youth strategy, too.

A special adviser is engaged in the field of youth in six municipalities, who is directly responsible to the Mayor, Director of Municipal Administration or the Registrar of the Municipality. In addition to special advisers, we can define special organization units, committees or special working bodies of the municipal council who are responsible to the Mayor, the Head of Social Activities or the Director of Municipal Administration. Municipalities have also cited a special commission for youth affairs, who shall be responsible to the municipal council or the Mayor and to offices or sectors for youth, who shall be responsible to the Mayor or the department in which they fall under.

4.4. Public Tenders

The most common instrument of support for young people is a public tender or call, with which a contracting authority ensures the implementation of specified activities on some specified theme or for their needs. Nearly all municipalities in Slovenia regularly publish tenders according to their capacity. 64 municipalities and one regional development agency invite tenders, which (in)directly finance youth programs. According to content, these tenders are very diverse and include the following thematic sections:

- youth education (scholarships, awards, incentives, undergraduate and post graduate work)
- youth and children in general (leisure activities, programs and projects for young people)
- associations, institutions and other organizations (for cultural performances, events, tourism, social activities)
- civil society activities (humanitarianism, social welfare, minorities)
- entrepreneurship and employment
- other (research, education).

Municipalities publish the most tenders for youth education, followed by tenders for youth programs and projects, then entrepreneurship, employment and the economy, which incorporates young people and tenders for associations and other organizations.

5. The Challenges of Municipalities and the Systemic Regulation of the Youth Field in the Municipality

The research also touched on the challenges, which municipalities face when working with young people. The following challenges are mentioned most often:

- disengaged youth
- vandalism, alcohol and drugs
- brain drain
- inadequate facilities for primarily club youth activities
- problems with staff in the youth field
- finance
- inadequate support for young people
- insufficient integration of youth organizations
- non-existent local youth program
- organization of entire policy.

Within the context of the systemic organization of the youth field, the research showed that municipalities govern the youth field very differently, e.g.

- the municipality has appointed a commission for youth affairs, which can have very different tasks and competencies, the youth field is engaged by the office for non-commercial public service
- the municipality has appointed a commission on youth, its suggestions are taken into account in the development of the youth field
- the municipality has appointed a committee on youth as an advisory body of the municipal council, otherwise the department for social activities shall provide the co-financing and monitoring of extra-curricular activities
- the municipality has appointed a working body of the municipal council for youth, which has very different tasks
- the municipality has established a youth office as an independent office
- the municipality has established a youth office, which operates within the context of other offices (e.g. the department for preschool education, office for culture)
- the municipality has a consultant for youth affairs who is directly responsible to the Mayor or the Director of Municipal Administration
- the municipality has a youth centre, which is organized as an organizational unit within the context of the Institute of Sport
- the municipality has established a public institution in the field of youth
- the municipality has a development agency, which is also concerned with the youth field.

6. Conclusion

At the end of the research the author presents some recommendations on the basis of the results:

Recommendation 1: Consider the system of organization for youth organizations, which transcend from the local to the national level.

Recommendation 2: Only young people are represented in national youth organizations, whose orientation is explicitly of interest (scouts, tourism, rural youth and students), philosophical (Christian) or political (youth political organizations) At the national level there is no unorganized youth, sports youth associations, uneducated youth and others who have already completed school and are not treated as part of the active populations because they are unemployed. Since there are no representatives of these youth groups, it would be necessary to think about additional mechanisms through which the interests of these young people can be represented at the national level.

Recommendation 3: Integrate local community youth councils with the Youth Council of Slovenia, to ensure the representation and dissemination of information, challenges, suggestions and recommendations from the local level to the national level for the purpose of creating programs for young people.

Recommendation 4: The research showed that numerous municipalities hand over the youth field to public institutions, which exclusively or in cooperation with related themes (tourism, sport, culture or education) deal with youth programs, creating work strategies, informing, training and developing etc. and also see them as an advocate for young people. Given the dramatic increase in the establishment of youth centres (in 2005 there were 44 youth centres and in 2009 there were already 57) it is expected that this trend will continue. As a result of the increase and the attitude of municipalities towards youth centres, the attitude towards youth centres must also be modified at the national level.

Recommendation 5: Reporting of youth organizations is limited by the frames of final reports, which represent a mandatory part of the tenders and calls. The long-term impact of youth programs and projects is not monitored, since it is not even possible due to different reporting methods. The problem also lies in the fact that there are no real indicators of success, since active young people is an indicator that is too general. It is therefore necessary to standardize the report as well as redefine indicators of success.

Recommendation 6: Given the size of the municipalities, different perceptions of youth centres and different youth political systems in each municipality it would be reasonable to consider the establishment of regional youth centres. If dealing with the youth field in the first place is the matter of each municipality and consequently also their funding, it would be necessary to establish or grant a status for regional youth centres for the needs of developing a national policy, which would provide for a uniform development of the municipal youth policy and support to young people in the entire region.

References

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