

A photograph of footprints in sand. On the left, there are several dark, irregular footprints. On the right, there is a single, clear, light-colored footprint. The sand is a mix of light and dark tones, suggesting different textures or perhaps shadows.

# Steps towards successful youth policy in local communities

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## Local youth policy

**Youth policy** came into being as a concept in the second half of last century when the Western European countries realized they need to develop a special long-term strategy that will respond to the needs of young citizens, which would not only have solved the problems of this social group, but in the long run it would ensure social development for all citizens. Youth policy as public policy has primarily developed within the Council of Europe, which is still considered to be a leading supranational organization in the field of youth policy.

**The Council of Europe** has not only given the technical assistance to the member states in developing national youth policy, but it also emphasised the development of local youth policy. Local youth policy is sometimes more important than national policy, because it brings large strategies into the local level, where the needs of young people can be precisely identified and efficiently answered. The adoption of the *Euro-pean Charter on Youth Participation in Local and Regional Life*

from the year 1992 (revised in 2003) has emphasised the development of local youth policy. The participation of young people is the key point in the creation and implementation of local youth policies, which can be easily discerned even from the name of this international convention.

In Croatia, youth participation appeared on the agenda as late as 2001, when the processes for setting out a national youth strategy kicked off, and when a legislative framework for the mechanism of youth participation in decision-making processes at local levels was created. This period also saw the creation of the national umbrella of youth organizations – the Croatian Youth Network. Croatian Parliament in 2002 almost unanimously adopted the National Programme of Action for Youth (NPAY) as a strategy which would meet the priority needs of young Croatian citizens by the implementation of 110 measures in 8 chapters during a five-year period. It was not until late 2005 that the operational plan for the implementation of NPAY in 2006 and 2007 was approved, thus bringing the national youth policy in Croatia into existence. In 2009 a new youth strategy, **National Youth Program 2009-2013**, was adopted.

A legislative framework for youth participation in decision-making processes at local levels has been secured recently, adhering to NPAY's recommendations to state institutions and local authorities, which among other things, emphasize the development of local youth policies. Pioneers in this were the City of Zagreb as a regional self-government and Kutina as a local self-government who have adopted their own Local Youth Action Programmes. Today, a growing number of cities and counties prepares and adopts local youth action programmes, although there are still many obstacles for their implementation. In addition, in early 2007 the Act on Youth Advisory Boards was passed.

In the previous period the competent body for youth, the Ministry of Family, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, organized several regional conferences in Croatia where local authorities were encouraged to form partnerships with youth organizations to create local youth action programmes. These events were followed by national conferences thematically addressing the needs of local youth and supporting youth clubs and information centres for young

people who work at local levels to meet the needs and to solve the problems of youth. We are pleased with numerous examples showing that the local youth policy in Croatia is becoming the rule rather than the exception. Similar developments can be seen across Europe.

For a local youth policy to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to ensure functioning relations proposed through the institutional framework for youth policy, which requires **legislative, infrastructural and strategic changes** that ensure the development of local youth policy and the possibility of **free, independent and autonomous youth organizing in local communities**.

In the process of local youth policy development, it is important that local authorities include the beneficiaries, i.e. the young people who are part of the local community. In this guide we present a few possible models of institutionalized forms of youth participation which ensure that the **dialogue** between the key stakeholders, **young people and local authorities**, is based on partner relations. To make this true it is

necessary to enable coordination and networking of youth organizations, in order to ensure a strong youth voice which would advocate for their views and which would work in partnership with authorities in developing local youth policies.

Here we would like to mention that for the purposes of this publication the term “local” has been extensively interpreted, as in concepts like local action program for youth, local youth policies, local communities, etc., to refer to all “lower” levels in a country which are not national or central.

## Youth participation in society

**Participation means to involve and to be involved.** There may be three levels of participation:

1. People have influential positions and are important for decision-making, their opinions are taken into account and actions are made based on them.
2. People are involved in an organization or society, but others make important decisions instead of them and they inform members about new view points or actions to be taken.
3. People are members of an organization or society, but their voice is not heard since they cannot affect how the things work out. Members are expected to agree and to act upon the decisions made by others, and are powerless to change anything on their own. This level is de facto a level of non-participation.

# 6



These levels can be applied to all citizens, especially young people, who are in a specific situation of growing up and taking an active role in society. Young people should participate more in order to be informed about matters relevant to them, to develop their interests, make their voices heard, or simply to take concrete action in a specific field. Active engagement begins with good will and energy of individuals or groups by

identifying issues and problems, gathering information from various sources, identifying who is responsible for policy making, winning local support for their ideas, advising policy makers, and negotiating on action plans, if possible.

The meaning of youth participation in the development of partnerships between youth and adults in all areas of life is to enable young people to take on important roles in society so that the entire society can benefit from their contributions, ideas and energy. The concept of youth participation can be viewed in three ways, which are not mutually exclusive:

1. "Societal level" - young people as citizens have the right to fully participate in social, cultural, political and economic life (e.g. youth participation in education, employment, etc.).
2. "Organizational level" - young people have the right to be involved in decisions about policies, projects and programs designed to ensure their full participation in social life (e.g. youth participation in youth councils or project management).

3. “Personal level” - the right of youth to be involved and informed about decisions affecting their lives.

We know from experience that policy makers often have “good will” to involve young people in decision-making processes, but that approach is (probably) not effective in the long run. Mechanisms for youth participation must be ensured and this should not depend on someone’s whim or the personal commitment of an individual. The full participation of young people is not created over night. Young people with disabilities, or marginalized young people are most of their life excluded from decision-making processes and they need much support and encouragement. On the other hand, young people who volunteer are louder, assertive and more confident. In order to ensure real equality of participation it is necessary to reach the “other” young people and to find strategies that will offer them space, time and resources to participate.

In practice, **youth participation** can be shown in the following way:

1. Information - simply informing young people.
2. Consulting - providing various options, receiving feedback, but not allowing new ideas.
3. Joint decision-making - supporting additional options and ideas and enabling joint decision-making.
4. Working together - not only do different parties decide together what is the best, but they also create partnerships to implement it.
5. Supporting independent community interests - for example, local initiatives and organizations are offered funds, advice or other support to develop their plans within a common strategy.

Information and consulting are not considered as forms of participation, but often they are presented as such. This can lead to illusions about the implementation of common strategies, and even to conflict, since something which is not a



form of participation is being presented as such.

Participation of young people belongs in the context of youth initiatives, which are an integral part of youth work, while the social context is a broader term comprising youth work as well. From this hierarchy it is evident that the participation of young people is an integral part of society and its development, a not being aware of this fact is one of the fundamental assumptions of the young people's passivity. It is possible to propose different reasons for that: lack of information, socio-historical conditions, lack of trust in the structures of power and the consequent pessimism, impact of media on consumer behaviour of youth, conformism - the "I don't feel like it" syndrome, lack of mechanisms, lack of incentives from the formal education sector, disregarding volunteering as a value, under-valuation of volunteering by the society, cost-benefit philosophy, family, poor quality of leisure time and lack of self-confidence.

The forms of youth participation can be divided into permanent and occasional. The permanent are: elections, political parties, youth associations, long-term projects, the presence

in the media, advisory bodies, youth councils, social institutions, religious groups, young entrepreneurs and other groups organized to promote an interest. The occasional are: forms of youth participation in protests, petitions, campaigns, labour actions, promotions, fairs and festivals, sports activities, charitable activities, media appearances / engagements and radical / illegal actions.

Assumptions for the realization of these forms are an **active civil society, access to information and openness of state and local structures for the participation of youth**. Motivation plays a major role in this process and it may be internal and external. The first one comes down to personal reasons and experiences in encouraging young people to become active citizens; and the latter refers to engaging young people in public discourse and decision-making processes. Both are not mutually exclusive but are interdependent and complementary.

However, youth participation in the democratic life of any community does not mean just voting or standing in elections. As

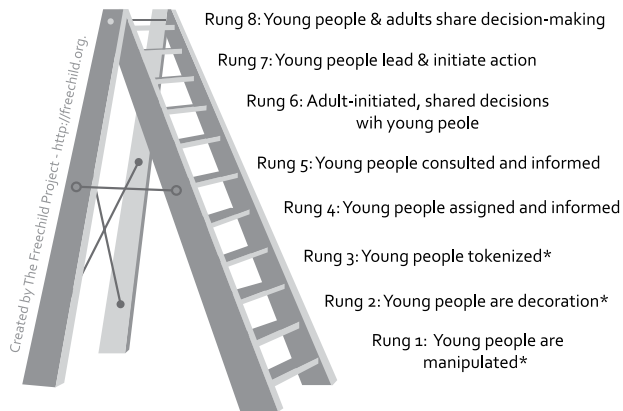
stated in the “**Amended European Charter<sup>1</sup> on youth participation in local and regional life**” of the Council of Europe, active citizenship and participation action imply that the citizens have the **rights, resources, space and opportunity** - and, where it is necessary, **support - to participate in decisions affecting their lives and to engage in actions and activities which contribute to building a better society**.” This key role is played by regional and local authorities that should provide a space for youth participation, but it is recommended to avoid the awkward phrases and wording like “the youth are our future”. If young people will not shape and influence the deci-

1 European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life adopted on 19 March 1992 is an integral part of the Resolution 237/92 of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. A conference to assess the progress made in the field of youth participation in the last 10 years was held in Krakow in 2002 and the Krakow Declaration was adopted confirming that young people are citizens of municipalities and regions, therefore, all forms of participation in society must be available to them. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in May 2003 adopted a “revised” Charter which was then divided into three parts: the first part consists of guidelines for local and regional authorities to implement policies that are important for young people in many areas; the second part provides an instrument for promoting youth participation, and in the third part they offer advice on how to provide favourable institutional conditions for the participation of young people

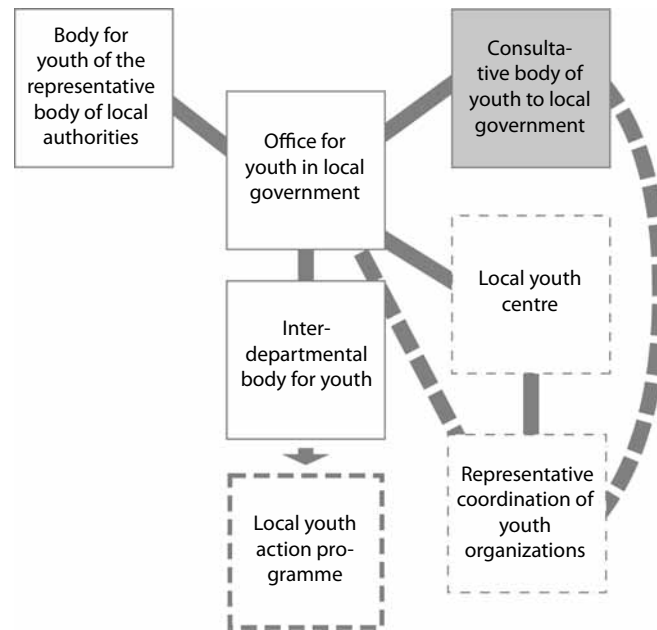
sions and actions while they are young, can we expect them to do so at a later period of life? Active citizens are created through action, and this always refers to something current, not something future and possible. Therefore, young people should be given a certain number of instruments that are listed in the Charter such as “Developing education on the participation of young people, informing young people, ensuring means of communication for young people, supporting their projects and emphasising commitment of youth to the objectives of the community and to volunteering”.

Although the participation of young people depends on a number of stakeholders, such as youth organizations, regional and local authorities, etc., functional and effective participation of youth at the local level is based on the awareness of young citizens of the social, cultural and political change. The best mechanism and a means to achieve awareness is the permanent representational youth structure in the form of a coordination of youth organizations in a specific local community showed in the illustration of the institutional youth policy framework which includes all relevant actors and their relations.

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



## The institutional framework of local youth policy



**Office for youth in the regional and local government** – is the executive governing body responsible for coordinating development and implementation of youth policy at the regional and local level. Number of employees depends on the size of the unit - city, municipality or county.

**Body for youth of the representative body of local authorities** – It usually called “Committee for Youth”, and its members are mostly young representatives in the municipal/city assembly or council. This entity within the regional/local representative body of local authorities is responsible for the preparation of acts and decisions of the assembly or the council relating to young people (e.g. drafting of local youth action programme).

**Consultative body of youth** to local government – is a body with an advisory role established by regional or local governments in order to develop transparent and quality local youth policy. In Croatia this body is called Youth Advisory Board and its work is regulated by the Act on Youth Advisory Boards which will be described further in this publication.

Members of this body are representatives of formally registered youth organizations selected by local and regional self-government through a public call for candidates, for a term of two years.

**Inter-departmental body for youth** - is not a governing body, but a committee or a body with a similar name that meets 4 to 6 times a year to observe the cross-sector cooperation and participates in the coordinated implementation of local youth policy. It consists of representatives of all relevant offices and departments of local and regional governments that deal with different aspects of youth policy (employment policy, cultural policy, health policy, etc.), and aims to ensure cooperation and coordination among all relevant administrative bodies that are in charge of implementing measures of the Local Youth Action Programme. This body oversees the implementation of local youth policy, and besides institutional representatives and representatives of self-organized youth sector, it includes researchers and experts on youth issues. In some countries Youth Advisory Board and inter-sectorial body for young people are joined

and have the same role as an inter-departmental body for youth, but the number of representatives from the local and district/regional institutions and the number of representatives of youth are the same.

**Representative coordination of youth organizations** (a local network of youth organization) – is not a body of regional and local governments, but it is still a part of the institutional framework of local youth policy. A representative body of youth is usually called city, municipal and county councils, or co-ordinations, or youth networks and they are almost always initiated by the youth organizations that wish to join the regional or local level, and rarely by regional or local authorities. Local Youth Council is a special form of organization that is autonomous in decision-making, with the legitimacy to represent youth stakeholders, particularly towards the regional and local authorities and administration. Youth organizations (youth associations, political youth organizations, youth initiatives, etc.) that are active in some local communities usually come together and form formal or informal coordination which serves as a platform for the implementation of joint

activities among youth organizations, and harmonisation of attitudes towards regional and local authorities, for public relations and participation in the process of development and implementation of local youth policy. Croatian Youth Network took part in the process of founding a dozen of city and county councils facilitating the process of networking and supporting the development of councils and local youth policies.

**Local youth centre** – is a public (or semi-public) institution with a sustainable management model secured through partnership between the regional and local government and the youth sector. This partnership and the extent of activities is what differs the local youth centre from a Youth Club which is in most cases initiated and managed solely by youth organizations and its work is usually limited to a smaller geographical area (neighbourhood, etc.).

**Local program (action) for youth (LY(A)P)** - is the final result of the process and the meaning of the entire institutional framework that should support its implementation. Local Action Programme for Youth is a materialised local youth policy

that responds to the needs of youth, through a multi-year strategy that includes different measures and which various regional and local institutions are in charge of. Office for Youth established by the regional or local government is a body responsible for preparation and coordination of the implementation, while the inter-departmental youth body oversees the implementation and ensures inter-departmental cooperation and coordination. Local programs (activities) for young people, of course, lean on broader youth policies on national level and complements it by identifying precise needs of young people in a particular community and adequately responding to these same requirements.

## Consultative and representative body of young people at local level

In European practice, there are two basic forms of institutionalized youth participation in decision-making processes in local communities – consultation (through youth advisory boards) and representation (through youth councils). These two forms of youth participation are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary - they complement each other.

**1. Consultative form** of participation is represented by an advisory body that is organised by a regional or local authority for consultancy on the implementation of youth policies with beneficiaries, i.e. the young people. Advisory bodies are divided into three groups, according to the type of members that are invited into the advisory body by the government:

a) representatives of young people - members of the advisory body are representatives of youth organizations and representatives of local youth coordination/network;

b) non-organized youth - young people the local government elects, mostly by means of a call for candidates, in order to set up a sort of focus group of young people whose members will be: students, high-school students, young employed persons, unemployed persons, entrepreneurs, members of associations, members of political parties, etc.;

c) a combination of the first two models - representatives of the organisations are invited but the non-organised young persons are also included. The underlying idea is that average young people will be able to accurately identify the problems of youth, and youth representatives will have greater experience in dealing with youth issues and advocacy for the implementation of public youth policy.

**2. Representative form** of participation is made by a coordination or a network of youth organizations on the basis of

their legitimacy and the number of members, heterogeneity and quality. A coordination or a network represents young people in a community towards all stakeholders, particularly towards regional or local authorities, and is independent. In this way, the local government receives one interlocutor for the entire youth sector, which, in turn, makes the communication and subsequent cooperation easier.

Legitimacy is derived from the following models:

a) direct elections - a list of young voters (15-29 years) in the local community is drawn up, and they elect their representatives in elections. In addition to the positive side of direct democracy, there are also negative sides – firstly, young people are largely uninterested in the elections, and secondly, a young person running for a position will require an election campaign for which financial resources of a young candidate can play a crucial role. Moreover, in this way youth organizations are completely bypassed and the option about creation of a parallel political system is neglected;



b) coordination/network of youth organizations - if local youth organizations recognize the thematic interests, or the programming connections with other local organizations for joint advocacy of local youth policy, we are talking about grassroots initiative in the creation of local councils, networks and coordination of youth organizations. Such practice in civil society, including the youth sector in Croatia and Europe-

wide, is increasing. All interested local youth organizations are gathered at the founding assembly of such a network or coordination, and if the majority of youth organizations respond positively to the initiative then a network or coordination advocating the interests of young people before the authorities and other stakeholders in youth policy is established. If such a network or coordination brings together a large number of youth organizations and confirms the inclusiveness, transparency and heterogeneity of action, within the European framework it is often called a local youth umbrella organization or a local youth council.

We believe that the latter form is the best and the most efficient one for several reasons:

- an initiative to create a body comes from the independent youth organisations and not by other stakeholders - it is very likely that the body will be autonomous in its decision-making and work;
- this kind of representative body includes all interested youth organizations in local communities, thus avoiding the difficult communication with a large number of government in-



stitutions. Besides, all youth organizations that are members of the body agree on their viewpoint before they approach the government, meaning that with an unanimous attitude they become more effective in advocating their interests;

- in addition to coordinating advocacy actions these organizations are linked through their programmes and implement joint activities;

- youth organizations have much experience in working with young people so that they can provide relevant suggestions for identifying and solving youth-related issues and problems;

- as a body that is not defined by a statute of regional or local government, this type of body does not depend on any change in government and changes of the political will for cooperation;

- the elections for the council/network/coordination representatives involve young people who are members of youth organizations in the agreed manner of functioning of the council/network/coordination.

The essential difference between the two institutionalized forms of participation by young people is communication with the regional and local authorities and the possibility of influencing their decisions. In consultative forms the communication with the regional and local authorities takes place directly and the possibility of influencing the decisions of the authorities is provided by the fact that young members of the advisory bodies have direct access to decision-making processes. In the representative form the communication with local authorities takes place mostly indirectly - through the public or in any other manner that is not institutionalized. The possibility to influence government decisions is provided by the fact that the local network or the coordination of youth organization brings together a large number of youth organizations which advocate the views of young people towards the authorities. Another difference is in the fact the council or network as a representative body exists permanently - its role is not to coordinate youth organizations positions occasionally, but constantly informs members and enables collective implementation of various types of activities either externally or internally with regards to strengthening their own ca-

pacities. On the other hand, youth advisory bodies exist only when they meet several times a year and very much depend on the change of government.

The representative body of youth is always functional, while a youth advisory body serves as a “bridge” for institutionalized dialogue between the representative body located outside regional or local government system. When this dialogue is not efficient, and when opinions of youth representatives are not taken into account, then they can communicate their stance towards the authorities through public advocacy.

## Youth advisory boards

Croatia has recently recognized youth participation in decision-making at the institutional level, by forming advisory committees that fully follow European standards. The Act on Youth Advisory Boards was adopted by Croatian Parliament in 2007. The law regulates the establishment of youth advisory bodies by local and regional self-government with the aim of active involvement of young people in public life.

The representative body of local and regional government sends a public invitation to youth organizations to nominate their representatives 15-29 years old. Only registered youth organizations are eligible to candidate their representative for the youth advisory board. Registered organisations include: youth organizations, student organizations, youth clubs, youths of political parties, student councils...

Members of youth advisory boards are elected for two years, and their work includes discussions of issues relevant to young people, proposing legislation and programs for youth to authorities, and encouraging youth informing. The key activity of this body is participation in developing and monitoring of the implementation of local programs (activities) for young people. The Act promotes mutual cooperation of the youth council from different backgrounds. One of the advantages of this Act is to recognize the conflict of interest in order to exempt the member directly or indirectly linked to a matter on which the decisions are made. One of the negative aspects of the Act is that it is based on a strong, but not legally binding recommendation to form youth advisory boards, so a number of counties, cities and municipalities disregard this recommendation and choose not to form youth advisory boards.

## Youth Councils

Youth Councils are the key to the development of local youth policy. One of the main reasons for this is their focus on coordinating the work of different youth organizations at the local level. It should include a greater number of local youth organizations particularly interested in developing local youth policies, such as youth associations and associations for youth, local youth of political parties, student organizations, etc. which are interested in collaborating with other youth organizations with different orientation and together develop local policies for young people, mainly local youth action programmes. The primary task and purpose of youth councils is to act as a platform for mutual program cooperation and advocacy of interest, because without the cooperation of different youth organizations that operate through a common platform, collective expertise often cannot be amassed and pressure mechanisms which are sometimes needed to achieve objectives are often not possible to reinforce.

## Networking in the youth sector – the Croatian example

The model of networking within the youth sector in the Croatian local context proved to be a very efficient way of cooperation between youth organizations through joint advocacy actions and the collective strife to push for a change which contributes to the development of local youth policy, as well as to the rise of the quality of living standards of young people.

Through its work with young people - youth organizations, youth of political parties, high school students... - the Croatian Youth Network systematically carried out a needs analysis preceded by an analysis of the position of young people in local communities. Both analyses included the following parameters:

- i. institutional framework;
- ii. facilities for young people – infrastructure for youth and youth programs;
- iii. collaboration of youth organizations, initiatives, local councils and young political parties with regional and local governments;
- iv. financial stability of youth organization.

The collected data indicated that one of the continuing needs of youth associations and youth political organizations is to create **better coordination of youth activities aimed at joint contribution of young people in the development of youth policy, with the previously secured ongoing financial support.**

Networking of youth organizations reflects a qualitative shift in the three following levels:

- a. **Thematic linking**
- b. **Financial stability**
- c. **Sustainability**



**The thematic linking or programme networking** of youth organizations is the space that the entities use for the dissemination and exchange of experiences in the field of youth policy. This thematic linking deems necessary to encourage communication skills, particularly the dialogue, both within the connected entities - for a clearer definition of the process of developing local policies, and 'outwards' in terms of

creating partnerships with all relevant stakeholders. The creation of such cooperative models provides an opportunity to exploit all available resources and knowledge with the aim of improving the quality of joint work and contributing to greater efficiency in making positive changes in the field of youth policy.

**Financial stability** is usually one of the key achievements made by coordinated action of youth organizations. The underlying assumption is that cooperation and joint advocacy pressure not only provide positive developments in the area of thematic networking, but also the possibilities of financing long-term actions of the related entities.

**The sustainability** of youth networking is questioned and realized at the level of common interest and in defining, advocating, implementing and evaluating policies that organizations are often unable to do on their own. Creating and "fine-tuning" national and local youth policies is a long-term process that requires continuous action and an ongoing needs analysis, participation, flexibility, efficiency, etc.,

which inevitably requires and consequently ensures constant strengthening of capacities of youth organizations at the level of human resources and programming and organizational stability.

When talking about linking youth organizations, particularly at the programme level, and bearing in mind our previous experiences of educational and capacity-raising activities aimed at developing models of youth collaboration, we consider that it is important to include in national and local youth policy processes all relevant stakeholders. The stakeholders necessary for the transparent, effective and participatory process of local policy are the following:

- youth-led associations and association working with youth
- student organisations
- high school student council
- youth branches of local political parties
- youth initiatives
- youth clubs
- other forms of youth organizing.

Young people can cooperate through associations, federations, networks, coalitions, councils... which can be formal or informal. The idea of youth networking is featured in numerous documents as a desired principle, process and an outcome.

## Local Youth (Action) Programme

With regards to the subsidiarity principle and a better needs-based approach, it is recommended that national youth policy in a country also scales down onto local levels so as to ensure more appropriate answers to particular needs of local youth. In this context, one of the main wheels at the local level and the final product of the policy process are the **creation and adoption of Local Youth (Action) Programme (LY(A)M)**. LY(A)M is usually a document by a local government representing a local youth policy. It is usually proposed by the executive body (e.g. city or county government), and adopted by the representative body of government (e.g. city council or county assembly). In this way **local youth policy** becomes official. Youth organizations can contribute to the activities, objectives and results of local youth policy and they should definitely be involved in its creation. It is also possible, although it is legally indisputable, that the regional or local authority creates and adopts

LY(A)M without the participation of other relevant stakeholders in the process, but the legitimacy of such local youth policy is questionable since the process was not transparent and participatory towards young citizens.

To avoid these difficulties, it is necessary to meet several assumptions: developed youth sector, the existing will of regional or local authorities, and interest and willingness of both these actors for the partnership. The partnership with young people is the key to good governance and good youth policy. Namely, if in the context of workers' rights, representatives of trade unions should and must be consulted, similarly in the context of youth policy young people should and must be involved in a same manner and be equally represented. The principle of co-management, which is advocated, promoted and affirmed by the Council of Europe<sup>2</sup>, rests on the same assumption - equal participation of young people on all levels in

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2 In cooperation with All different, all equal from Serbia, Forum MNE from Montenegro and the Association of High School Students of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Youth Network published in 2009 'Co-management - how does it work?'

areas that are relevant to young people. In practice, this means that an advisory body to the local or state government that deals with youth must include an equal number of representatives of youth organizations and authorities. If a body only deals with one or more segments relevant to young people (e.g. education or juvenile delinquency), then young people should be represented according to the estimated relevance to young people.

Only equal participation of youth in the development and adoption of strategic documents of local youth policy gives full legitimacy for its implementation, because LY(A)P as a long-term<sup>3</sup> strategy with measures that will improve the quality of life for young citizens' must be of utmost importance for them, as well. Each LY(A)P consists of a number of measures of short-term and specific objectives which have to be achieved within a certain time-frame foreseen for LY(A)P (e.g. "Create a directory of non-formal education that exists in the city"). Certain measures are grouped into different sectors, such as employ-

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3 Mostly five-year, although there are examples of three-year to seven-year strategies.

ment, culture and leisure, mobility and education. Also, each measure within each category must indicate institution(s) responsible for its implementation, thereby creating collaboration with relevant stakeholders. In addition to the partnerships between local authorities and youth organizations, stakeholders to be involved in the process of LY(A)P are representative of local administration, regional or local authorities, representatives of interested local institutions and experts and researchers in the field of youth. If all the stakeholders are present and if all the assumptions are fulfilled, the ideal process of creation and adoption of a LY(A)P should look like this:

### **1. Constituting the working group**

The initiative for LY(A)P may come from youth organizations or from regional or local authorities. In any case, the process should begin from regional or local authorities, because they are responsible for local youth policy. A working group which will be in charge of managing and directing the process should be established. Its chair should ideally be a representative of the government, and the group should meet according to an agreed schedule.



## **2. Researching youth needs**

The goal is to get as much information about the needs and problems of youth at the local level. It is also necessary to consult young people on possible solutions which they proposed themselves. This can be done by conducting surveys and focus groups, based on a representative sample of young people (e.g., focus groups attended by employed and unemployed young people, representatives of youth organizations, high-school students, young people from rural and urban areas, etc.). Round tables and panels can also be organized. It is very important to motivate young people to join these activities and is therefore recommended to organize a comprehensive campaign to attract as many young people as possible.

## **3. Data analysis**

The working group receives all the information, analyses the data and based on the results decides which groups of issues are relevant to the local environment. They finally decide which thematic chapters will be contained in the document. If possible, it would be important to include experts

in the research process who would conduct and analyse the research in a professional and scientifically sound manner.

## **4. Establishing thematic expert groups**

Based on the areas that reflect the needs of young people at the local level, thematic expert groups are formed within the working body responsible for elaborating the thematic chapters. Usually, members of the body divide themselves according to the level of expertise and interest, and invite other external professionals to join expert groups.

## **5. Elaborating LY(A)P**

Members of the expert groups write and elaborate separate chapters of the document. It is recommended to consult all relevant stakeholders during this process, depending on the subject matter. Areas or chapter within the document may be, for example, education, health, civil society, economy, youth participation, etc.

## 6. Adoption of the draft by the working body

The working body meets, discusses specific chapters for each topic and drafts the final version, which is ultimately adopted.

## 7. Public consultation on the draft

It is recommended to make several public hearings to invite as many representatives of civil society organizations, youth organizations, local institutions and the so-called “ordinary” young people who are not involved in organization. The draft document may be put up on the website of the regional and local governments or websites of youth organizations, providing all the necessary information about the consultation process. It is recommended to launch a small campaign in order to include young people who did not participate in the process so far.

## 8. Adoption of the final version of the document

Contributions from the public hearings are taken into consideration and incorporated into the final version, which is thus revised.



## 9. Sending the proposal to the local government and the committee (responsible) for youth in the representative body of local government

Government reviews the document and aligns it in accordance with their administrative systems.

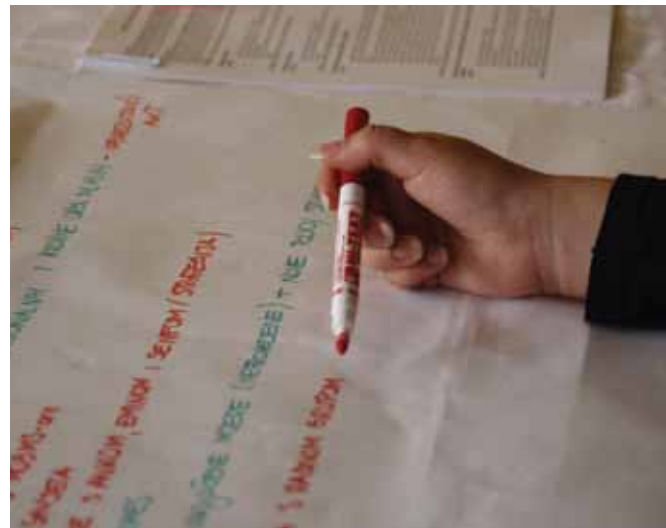
## 10. Discussing and voting of the LY(A)P in the representative body of local government

Final discussion of the document takes place in city councils, municipal councils or county councils, where the representatives give their contributions to the final document. If youth organizations or citizens believe that there is still something to add which is not included in the present process, now is the time to intervene through lobbying youth representatives to advocate for their suggestions and opinions.

In Croatia, LY(A)P is created in two ways, each having its advantages and disadvantages. However, both models owe largely to improvisation, and cannot be considered systematic processes as presented in our ideal model. In the following paragraphs we present descriptions of the two models, which we will call after the names of the cities in which they were used:

### 1. The “Zagreb” model

There is a “critical mass” of young representatives in the representative body of the local government who understand



the needs in the youth sector and wish to find solutions. They communicate with civil society organizations and senior party colleagues. The local government establishes a working body composed of young representatives in the city assembly, representatives of youth organisations and experts in the field of youth (e.g. academics). They meet together and agree on a work plan.

## 2. The “Kutina” model

There is a “critical mass” of youth organizations or they cooperate through a representative network or coordination. Young people come together, agree on a common goal to create LY(A)P, but do not require the participation or approval of local authorities for the process. Instead they plan to create the entire document which will be sent subsequently to local authorities for adoption. From the very beginning they lead an intensive communication with young representatives in the city assembly which are their main lobbyists within the structure of local government.

The main advantages of the first model is the existence of political will and necessary funds, and the shortcomings, which are inherent to any other model based on the “top-bottom principle”, are the lack of expertise on the subject matter, questionable representation of young people and the need to push for partisan interests. In the second model, with the “bottom-top” approach, the major shortcomings are the lack of political power, inadequate involvement of government structures and other institutions, and the unilateral perspec-

tive of youth organizations. On the other hand, the benefits are better knowledge of the youth issues, knowledge of the youth sector and relevant stakeholders and the high involvement of young citizens in the process.

Both models are characterized by insufficient linkages between local authorities and youth organizations. This does not necessarily imply poor results, but in order to make them even better and the LY(A)P more complete, the collaborative partnership of the two key stakeholders, as described previously, is needed from the beginning to the end of the process. The crucial matter, regardless of the model used, is that the LY(A)P process must be visible in the public in order to avoid the following:

- a) the local government adopts the document, but the budget does not provide the necessary financial resources for its implementation;
- b) local government cancels the adoption of the document in the middle of the process;
- c) the government is changed; the document is attributed to the previous government and the implementation of the document is stopped.

Once the LY(A)P is adopted by the representative body of the regional or local authorities, the process is by no means over. Specifically, the adopted LY(A)P must be followed by agreeing on the operational plan which defines for each measure the institution or body within the local authority responsible for its implementation, partners and stakeholders, activities, budget, time-frame, performance indicators and means of monitoring and evaluation. Only the adoption of the operational plan ensures the implementation of the programme, because it is based on the allocated budget.

In our ideal system the “cross-sector body” oversees the implementation of the LY(A)P, and the “office for youth” is the main administrative body responsible for the implementation. The partnership between local authorities and young people becomes even more important because the selected priority measures in a given time-frame need to be respected. Monitoring should also be carried out by civil society organizations which are not represented in the “cross-sector body”, as well as active young citizens.

## Cooperation with local authorities

According to all relevant documents and research, creating partnerships with local and regional authorities is crucial for transparent and inclusive participatory communication and for securing financial stability and sustainability of non-governmental organisations in local communities.

The partnership between local authorities and a representative coordination of youth organisations (e.g. regional youth council) can prove beneficial in many respects:

- it opens a broad public debate on cooperation of youth organizations and local governments with an emphasis on a transparent system of informing and funding;
- it supports the development of LY(A)Ps through financial support for the entire policy process explained above;

- it supports the development of youth advisory committees in cities or regions;
- it supports the development of local youth organizations and local youth councils and the implementation of joint programs (e.g. youth centres).

Ongoing support to young people to participate actively in society is a must for any responsible government which is determined to secure better conditions and improve the quality of life for young people.

## A short glossary of terms used in this publication

- **Young people** - a social group defined by age. In different countries definition may vary, but broadly speaking, young people in the European context are aged between 13 and 30.
- **Youth policy** - a set of principles, values, attitudes, goals and actions which aim at improving the quality of life of young people. Youth policy may be implemented by governments and public institutions, but it is carried out in cooperation with youth organizations, civil society, experts, media and the community as a whole.

- **Local youth policy** - a set of principles, values, attitudes, goals and actions which aim at improving the quality of life of young people in the local community, usually made concrete in the form of a strategic document called local (action) programme for youth.
- **National Program for Youth** – a national youth policy document in a certain country. In Croatia the National Programme of Action for Youth was a five-year strategy with 110 measures, adopted by Croatian Parliament in 2002. The National Programme for Youth was adopted in 2009 by Croatian Government and it will be implemented till 2013.
- **Local Youth Action Programme (LY(A)P)** - a regional or local youth policy document comprising a multi-year strategy for young people on regional or local level
- **Youth organisations** - forms of youth self-organising include youth associations, youth clubs, youth branches of political parties, youth initiatives, pupils' councils, student councils, student organizations, informal youth initiatives and other forms.
- **Youth association** – legally registered association of citizens working for and with youth. It is run by young people who are democratically elected amongst the members of the association.
- **Association for youth** – legally registered association of citizens working for and with youth but not necessarily run by young people.
- **Youth branches of political parties** - (more or less) autonomous entities within political parties which bring together young members of the party.

- **Youth club** - a space for young people open for fixed hours during the day which offers various programmes for youth. It can be registered as an independent NGO or it can operate as a programme/project of an existing NGO. Youth clubs can also be run by local authorities. Youth club is an autonomous space in which young people create content according to their needs.
- **Youth centre** - specialized space where traditionally youth work takes place. In youth centres young people have access to a wide array of services and programmes (education, information, free time activities, counselling...). Youth centres can be run by NGOs or local/regional authorities and they are usually staffed by professional youth workers.
- **Pupils' council** - democratic structure elected by school students which has consultative and/or representative role towards educational institutions.
- **Informal youth initiative** - can be initiated by two or more young persons who share a common goal to effect social change in a particular area through action, but it is not a legal entity.



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