

**Youth policies and strategies in the context of the MDGs**  
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Models of youth political participation-Background document  
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The present paper represents (in coordination with the power point presented at the seminar) a collection of information on youth participation within the European (or more properly pan-European) framework.

The experience coming from the last ten years from the European youth field has created a model of youth involvement and responsibility that can be considered as an element of interest for other regional and sub regional areas.

Nowadays the European youth organisations that want to be part of the process of cooperation with other youth associations coming from a different background and confront themselves with the government or related institutions represent the vast majority in terms of numbers.

Our analysis starts from the bottom level in order to follow the youth NGOs or youth associations from local level in the sense of smaller communities until the general regional European arena of youth organisations. This itinerary helps us to understand better the different methods of participation, but also to identify the difficult configuration that the European youth network actually has in front of the national/European institutions.

As an opening point we should clarify what we consider youth organisations (primarily called youth NGOs or youth associations). Indeed we can use for our study a general concept of youth organisation based on a wider and comprehensive meaning of young people united in a same associative community aiming at a common target or sharing common values. Indeed we think about a large spectrum of youth experiences from the traditional political youth organisations (with an ideological or party belonging background) to the youth NGOs devoted to local/global actions of solidarity, from the youth associations uniting students (school or university students) to environmental friendly NGOs, from associations organizing exchange and trainings to youth organisations defending youth rights and social conditions.

Even there are different backgrounds in term of political targets, cultural and geographical belonging, some fixed criteria should be underlined to consider a possible example of youth organisation for our study.

Therefore we consider as a good case a youth association based on an internal democratic life (ruled by statutes and rules of procedure), based on active membership and respecting an age limit.

Concerning the last item, the age issue, some more comments should be made: youth is defined by the UN between the ages of 15 and 24. Nevertheless in many youth organisations (and youth institutions) the age limit is extended till a proper border that enables their longer involvement in the action.

In order to close the preliminary definition of youth organisations it is better to have in mind two other definitions coming from the UN World Youth Report:

“Firstly youth organisations can be differentiated according to the participation level. There are different levels of participation. The higher the level of participation, the more control, influence and responsibility young people will have on the outcomes. There is a difference between ad-hoc and structural participation. Ad-hoc refers to participation in a certain project or conference, while structural participation signifies a more continuous involvement, over a longer period of time.

There is also a difference between direct and indirect participation. Direct participation implies direct contact with the decision-making person or body. Indirect participation refers to having one's opinion represented by someone else, for example a youth council or youth worker. Young people can decide themselves on which level, and in what ways, to participate, although the choice will probably be dependent on the willingness of the organisation and its representatives to listen to youth.

Youth participation is a process whereby young people influence, and share control and responsibility over decisions, plans and resources, which affect them. There is a distinction between two forms of participation. Social participation relates to influencing societal organisations and their activities, such as your school, sports club, or work place. Political participation relates to influencing local, regional, national and international politics.”

Having defined proximately the basis of our itinerary we should follow a “not defined” youth organisation on its track to take a position and express a social commitment within the society.

## 1) FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL TO THE NATIONAL

In most of the cases the youth participation starts from the bottom level of the society and in relation to the community life that surrounds the young women and the young men. A basic approach to the destiny of the local level can determine an attraction of the youth generation to the aspiration of doing something to change their personal life and to paralelly modify aspects of life of the entire community. Therefore it is necessary to empower this basic need or aspiration to participate fully in the lives of their societies giving the right to involve the young citizen in the definition of the local life. In this sense it is important to stress from one side that empowering young people means allowing them the opportunity to make decisions that affect their lives. On the other side this means also that they are at the forefront of worldwide social, economic and political developments: in addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support and become active agents for development and change.

Therefore the active participation on the local level can be considered not only as a local commitment. The aspiration for a more structural and global participation should be encouraged in order to result in participation on national as well as global levels where the policies and changes resulting from different activities are transferred to contribute to the worldwide development.

Through the local and national youth coordinating bodies – such as youth councils – young people contribute to raising and elaborating the issues that they consider of importance. The existence of youth councils is therefore of crucial relevance and importance to youth participation since it enables them to work independently from national governments and institutions with which they might be confronted through their activities. Participation in the youth councils also enables them a structured and coordinated participation in the work of these institutions by acting through consultations and common proposals on the issues of their concern. In this way they enable the participation of a wide political spectrum of youth organisations of different backgrounds in creating common platforms.

“For ensuring wide participation, young people should be provided with equal access to opportunities (such as education and employment), services (such as health care) and information. An important key to youth participation and empowerment is also equity: all youth should be able to participate. Involving youth in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of youth-related policies, programmes and services makes them more relevant, efficient and effective for their target group – young people.” (WYR)

Having had this basic democratic guarantee, the basic aspirations to be an actor of change can follow different tracks. Indeed at the local level both social and political organisations can be directed towards single-issue activities that have defined targets without a wider perspective or a horizon outside the local level. On the other side many political organisations based on a structural participation can have a destiny even outside the local level. Many youth organisations performing a set of issues horizontally, tackling the youth conditions or just concern on a proper one, can act in a multiple direction. Acting locally they find a consequent range of activities. Going out from the local level border and participating in a regional or national level the youth organisation can get more results or political feedback. In this sense the different levels of work – local, national and even global – become a part of the same work plan and of a multiplication of the tools to get concrete results. The important difference remains between the organisations involved in a basic issue action or those that have a horizontal perspective. The last term means full advocacy of the youth conditions in relation to the whole range of the political decision-making process: education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, combating racism and xenophobia, autonomy.

When youth political organisations develop a work plan they have as a necessary counterpart the institutions at different levels (from local to global). Therefore the first example of youth models of participation occurs, that has a consultative and/or a proposal approach towards the institutions. They can perform this kind of attitude vis-à-vis the institutions in a bilateral way or uniting the forces in a wider form of multilateral participation, namely the youth councils (local, regional, national). In both cases the consultation process and presenting proposals on the youth subjects risks to be weaker for the political weakness of the organised youth sector. Anyway the experience of the youth councils represents an answer because the unity of youth associations of different backgrounds can have a stronger voice on different matter in the consultation process with the institutions or the government.

While implementing the consultative model of participation of youth organisations, in order to further encourage it, certain points should be taken into consideration. The balance between the power of the decision makers and effectiveness of the consultative model must be reassessed – in other words the consultations must have a real importance while making the decisions. The consultative model must lead to effective actions at local/state level, in particular in order to continue to guarantee young people's support for and commitment to the process. Young people should be consulted constantly and on all issues of their concern, in a structured and effective way that enables wide participation.

## 2) EUROPEAN LEVEL

While discussing the youth participation on European level two models will be taken into consideration – the Open Method of Coordination and the Co-Management System. These two models will be considered concerning the experiences of the European Youth Forum and the Advisory Council of the Council of Europe. Indeed those are the direct consequent follow-ups of having a higher unity among the European (and pan-European) youth organisations in order to achieve better results on a continental level. The basic intuition of creating these two platforms is coming from the relations with the creation of the European Union from one side and the Council of Europe from the other. Both institutions provide and finance youth activities and they have a relevant importance on the concert of youth as a horizontal policy. Therefore youth organisations and youth councils created a regional alliance to become a counterpart with the above-mentioned European institutions. This kind of relation, after years of dialogue and common discussion, enabled two different models of youth participation that are much more effective and participatory than the typical consultative and proposal based models typical for the first stage of youth involvement. We are speaking about the Open Method of Cooperation and the Co-management system. The difference that this has created on the youth field is still under analysis and further definition but nevertheless represents a unique process on the worldwide level that has drastically transformed the perception of the youth involvement. Indeed the European involvement of youth organisations in a structured process most of the time had an influence on the national level youth policies, more underdeveloped or less participatory than the regional ones. Furthermore the unity of the youth organisations structured on the continental basis has created the possibility of a stronger global alliance, especially in the last ten years where the globalisation process put in the main frame the necessity of multilateral institutional cooperation among different continents.

### 2.1) The Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) exists and has been developed on the youth issue in relations with the European Youth Forum (a pan-European platform of national Youth councils and Non-governmental youth Organisations in Europe):

- Has been established in 1996
- Consists of 93 member organisations
- The European Youth Forum (EYF) is the only democratic youth structure in Europe representing youth organisations towards the international institutions - mainly the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations
- Is promoting the development of youth work in Europe and internationally
- Is providing services to member organisations.)

This chapter begins by considering the European Commission's White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* and the agreement of Common Objectives by the Council. Indeed this model of youth participation has as main actors the EYF and the European Commission that represents nowadays the executive power of the European Union in coordination with the European Parliament and the European Council (that gathers representatives of all the governments).

*The New Impetus for European Youth* had its roots in Viviane Reding's announcement as former Commissioner – Designate for Education and Culture – in the context of her European Parliamentary hearing for Commissioner – Designates in the summer of 1999 – that she planned a White Paper on youth and youth policy in Europe. This resulted in the launch of a broad and far-ranging consultation process, leading to the adoption of the European Commission's White Paper '*A New Impetus for European Youth*' in November 2001. This proposed an open method of coordination in the youth field. The White Paper was the first time that the European Commission presented a coherent strategy for a EU youth policy and it is therefore very important. The role of a White Paper is to outline the future scope for a policy that has not been an EU policy before. The White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* considered the challenges related to young people and youth policy, summarised the key messages that emerged from the consultation exercise and presented a proposal for how to move forwards to develop youth policy in the European Union. The model for an open method of coordination in the youth field proposed by the European Commission in the White Paper identified four areas for action: participation, information, voluntary service among young people and a greater understanding of youth. The methodology for implementing the open method of coordination was much looser than that used in other policy areas or the one defined in the Lisbon conclusions. The Commission proposed the following plan:

- Acting on a proposal from the Commission, the Council of Ministers periodically decides on priority areas of common interest.
- Each Member State appoints a coordinator, to act as the Commission's interlocutor, for youth-related issues. The various coordinators submit to the European Commission details of policy initiatives, examples of best practice and other material for consideration on the chosen topics.
- European Commission submits a summary and an analysis of this information to the Council of Ministers, accompanied by proposals for common objectives.
- The Council of Ministers sets out common guidelines and objectives for each of the topics and lays down monitoring procedures, and where appropriate, benchmarks based on indicators.
- The European Commission is responsible for periodic monitoring and evaluation, and reports on progress to the Council of Ministers for Youth.
- The European Parliament must have an appropriate role in this process and in the monitoring arrangements. The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also have to have the opportunity to give an opinion.
- Young people are consulted on the priority themes and on their follow-up.
- Applicant countries are associated as far as possible.

This decision making process does not have the youth on the same level of the regional or national institution level. Nevertheless it represents a step forward from the mere consultative process because it considers the youth organisations united in the EYF as a social actor permanently involved in the definition of the youth policies and related to the European horizontal policies that affect the youth conditions. In terms of negative impact we should register among other concerns the still weak action at the level of Member State, in particular in order to continue to guarantee young people's support for and commitment to the process.

## 2.2) Co-Management system

The second model of participation on the pan-European level is another particular definition of the relations between youth organisations and institutions. The co-management system (CMS) is even more effective and democratically open than the OMC and the simple consultation ones and remains an example of the possibility expressed by the youth experiences. Indeed the CMS

brings the youth organisations democratically appointed via the EYF (together with the youth partners of the Council of Europe – CoE) to decide on the same power level with the government representatives within the CoE on all the political and financial aspects of the CoE youth policy.

The Council of Europe is the continent's oldest political organisation, founded in 1949. It:

- Groups together 46 countries, including 21 countries from Central and Eastern Europe,
- Has granted observer status to 5 more countries (the Holy See, the United States, Canada, Japan and Mexico),
- Is distinct from the 25-nation European Union, but no country has ever joined the Union without first belonging to the Council of Europe,

Key bodies of the Council of Europe:

- Parliamentary Assembly (representatives of 45 National parliaments)
- Committee of Ministers (45 Ministers of Foreign Affairs – representing national governments)
- CLRAE (The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe – representatives of local and regional authorities)
- Secretariat General
- European Court of Human Rights

The Council of Europe is the architect of European youth policy. It first turned its attention to youth issues in the 1960s and its standard-setting work has been of major importance over the years. The continuing and ever-evolving work of the Council of Europe plays a vital role in youth policy all over Europe. The co-management model provides an inspiration and example of what can be achieved with the involvement of young people. Particularly important, and to be encouraged, are the national policy reviews and the contribution they play in the development of youth policy in Europe, as projects such as the 50:50 training courses and the contribution made to research on youth issues.

In fact the CoE Secretariat is divided in different fields of policy definition that act together with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. Concerning the youth issues the Directorate for Youth and Sport is directly appointed to execute the decisions. This body is under management and policy definition of Joint Council composed equally by government representatives and youth organisations working in the so-called Advisory Council. The Joint Council decides on the youth programme, allocates the resources and defines priorities and guidelines. Actually this experience is unique on the international level considering the political and economical power exercised.

The working Priorities of the Directorate for Youth and Sport 2003- 2005 are:

- Youth Participation
- Peace and Intercultural dialogue
- Human rights education and Social cohesion

Even this decision making process is a standing system of youth involvement, some negative evaluation of Co-Management System can be defined:

- The political and economical possibilities of the CoE are limited in order to intervene with a wider range of tools on the youth conditions
- The balance between the flexibility and effectiveness of the CMS must be reassessed
- The CMS must lead to effective action at Member State level, in particular in order to continue to guarantee young people's support for and commitment to the process

### 3) GLOBAL LEVEL

The last step of our itinerary presents a possible global model of youth participation via the unity of regional platforms (unity of national and local councils) and international organisations. This idea follows the general idea of strengthening the youth presence on the world level in front of the international institutions with the target of having common global aims and the defence of the regional or national youth claims. Although the Regional Youth Platforms have been cooperating with International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations as regards to institutional processes, there has never been an autonomous space where they could meet to prepare and coordinate joint efforts and political inputs to ongoing youth policy processes. The experience of the last few years had shown that the stronger the coordination of youth organisations was the more effective

and sustainable the impact on the outcomes of youth policy processes became and the better the youth interests were defended. Therefore in Geneva in July 2004 the European Youth Forum, together with the International Movement of Catholic Students and the World Organization of the Scout Movement convened an International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations.

The main objectives of this newly established platform are:

- Coordination of political inputs to the ongoing political processes affecting the youth worldwide
- Strengthening of the cooperation between the youth organisations with a regional and global outreach
- An effective participation of young people in global decision making processes and policy implementation implies that youth organisations with a global and regional scope of action

The International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO), by bringing together regional youth platforms and international youth organisations with a global outreach (representing non-formal education organisations, rural, political youth, trade unions, entrepreneurs, students, etc) constitutes a coalition of youth organisations that are representative and legitimate both in the eyes of international institutions and of the youth movement worldwide. ICMYO stands for two approaches towards the global institutions, offered to them as a way of involvement. Firstly the Open method of coordination and secondly the most welcome Co-Management system. It is crucial that the youth organisations that come together at the global level maintain a close link to the regional, national and local levels in order to secure outcomes that are faithful to reality. Hence the needs to guarantee that the youth organisations are membership based, representative and have a strong grass root presence in the different regions of the world. Since the first meeting the ICMYO organisations have been meeting regularly and exchanging information on a daily basis. ICMYO defined the guidelines for the cooperation with the World Bank as regards to the Children & Youth Strategic Framework for Action, the objectives of the cooperation with the Youth Employment Network and the composition of its Youth Consultative Group, as well as the youth organisation's line of action for the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth. ICMYO will also be a keystone to define the principles and criteria for the future editions of the World Youth Festivals. Moreover it is a coalition of organisations that, by cooperating together can help strengthening the youth organisations in the different regions of the world and contribute to a strong youth movement that can efficiently represent the interests of young people and contribute to build participatory and knowledge-based societies.

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2001 -, *IUSY delegate to the UN/WB/ILO meeting*

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2004 -, *IUSY delegate to ICMYO*