

# Thirty Years of Slovenian

Youth:

Developments  
in the Youth  
Sector Since  
Independence

**Tomaž Deželan, ed.**



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UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI  
University of Ljubljana

Thirty Years of Slovenian Youth: Developments in the Youth Sector Since Independence

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Youth

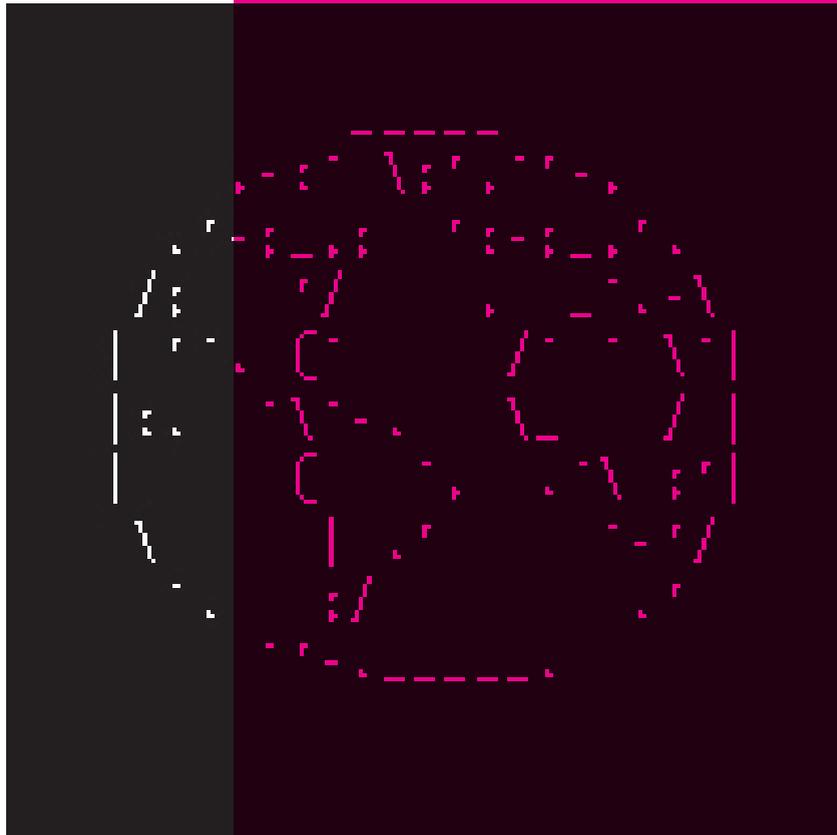
With Youth

By Youth

For Youth

Without Youth

No Youth



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Dr Howard Williamson  
Professor of European Youth Policy  
5 November 2024

# Preface

Tomaž took 8/10/24  
for my preface

When I first went to Slovenia in the late 1990s, for an important conference on youth transitions (*Flying Over, or Falling Through the Cracks?*), I was handed one of the best youth studies books I have ever read (and I have read a lot!). *Youth in Slovenia: new perspectives from the nineties*, by Mirjana Ule and Tanja Rener, two distinguished sociologists from the University of Ljubljana, was a majestic piece of work, illuminating the changes and the challenges experienced by, and facing young people in Slovenia, following the break-up of state socialism and Yugoslavia.

Tomaž Deželan's new publication is a text that, for both intellectual and inspirational reasons, follows in those footsteps. Almost thirty years on, Slovenia has tasted and embraced liberal democracy, become a member of various transnational clubs, including the European Union, and developed a participative and progressive policy framework for its young people. The latter is the essence of this book.

Each chapter considers the main shifts over the past three decades, accounts for evolution and development, and concludes with some level of evaluation of the progress made. More significantly, perhaps, is the fact that those contributing to the monograph are immersed in that history, possessing, as editor Deželan testifies,

an 'accumulated knowledge and experience' that provides an invaluable font of ideas for the future.

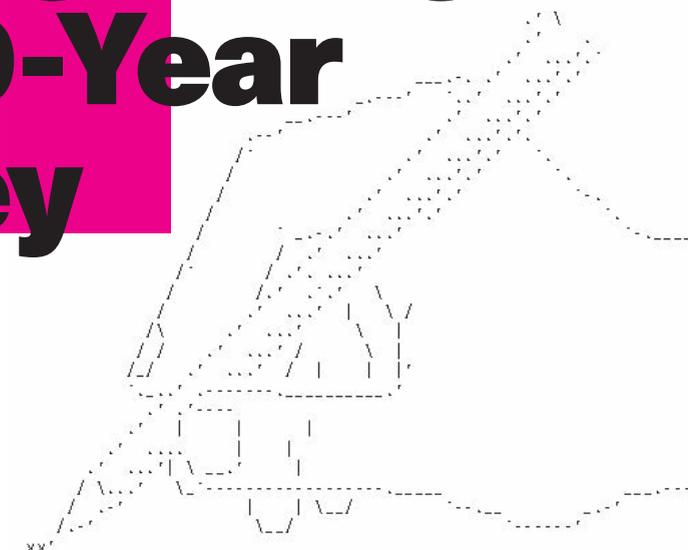
As Slovenia emerged from state socialism, with its 'transmission' approaches to youth and youth policy (securing the transmission of established political structures and values), young people embraced issues such as peace, ecology and sexual freedom, mirroring the 'key concerns of progressive youth in other parts of the world'. Those key concerns coalesced into one overarching demand, to be an integral part of the political system not, as a conference elsewhere in 'eastern' Europe has put it in the 1970s, as 'factors', but as a later Council of Europe conference in the 2000s put it, as 'actors' in social change. Yet demographic pressures, amongst others, have consistently denied or diminished the voice of young people in political decision-making, even on matters of direct concern to them – the bedrock of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is invariably a gap, sometimes gaping, between theories of youth political participation and its practice, between rhetoric and reality. It is not the only gap! The six substantive chapters of this book address both youth policy and the youth sector in Slovenia, its institutional and operational development, and its resource and evidence base. The findings, reflection and implications are, unsurprisingly, revealing. Its intense attention to detail is immensely informative, traversing the always rather uneasy relationships between policy proclamation, anchoring research knowledge and evidence, and practical developments on the ground at local level.

But that is the story everywhere. This story provides us with a wealth of understanding about Slovenia but it also conveys many salutary tales that we would be wise to consider in relation to our own youth policy and youth work histories and circumstances. To learn about Slovenia and to grapple with the tensions within the triangle of youth policy, research and practice is the important contribution this book makes to the youth sector in Europe at a time when there is some risk that rhetorical proclamation from on high is clouding some of the more grounded risks and realities.

Tomaž Deželan

# The Beginnings of a 30-Year Journey



This monograph aims to offer an in-depth look at the key shifts that have taken place within the most prominent youth and youth policy dimensions in Slovenia over the last three decades. The list of dimensions is, of course, not exhaustive; there are certainly others that deserve a closer look. Nevertheless, our work should be seen as an authentic attempt to provide a solid overview of over 30 years of effort in this often neglected field.

By tracing the key steps that have been taken in the period since Slovenian independence in 1991, we hope to establish a reference point for a consideration of the relevant development-related issues around the future of the Slovenian youth sector, and to provide key pointers for a wide variety of youth policy stakeholders. It is with this in mind that the topics and chapters have been arranged in roughly the same way throughout: an overview of the main shifts and turning points in the area under discussion, a description of how the area has developed over the last three decades, and finally (albeit to a more limited extent) an evaluation of the progress made. As far as evaluation is concerned, we offer a set of impressions and glimpses into the past, supported by data available from a variety of sources. While it is therefore difficult to refer to this monograph as an 'evaluation study' in any true sense, our assessments do provide a good starting point for a consideration of how the Slovenian youth field might look in the future. This is a common feature of all the chapters and one of the key characteristics of the monograph. The authors (or perhaps more accurately the 'correspondents') have rooted their views on future development mainly in the thoughts and opinions of the key stakeholders who have shaped, and who continue to shape, the youth field in Slovenia. Their accumulated knowledge and experience provide an invaluable source of ideas.

It is important to note, particularly for those coming to this subject for the first time, that regulation of the youth field in Slovenia did not start in 1991. Its early development

can be traced to the years preceding independence, mainly in the work that was done to organise young people and involve them in the political process. If we leave aside the period before 1980 (see e.g. Škulj, 2016), we could say that the youth arena was, prior to 1990, shared by social and political organisations that played a specific role in the system in place at the time, whether as 'sectoral' organisations, as an agreed link between young people and the world beyond, or as institutionalised ideological custodians of the system (Vurnik, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Under the socialist system, social and political organisations were a key form of political association for the population at large. One of most prominent was the Socialist Youth League of Slovenia (Zveza socialistične mladine Slovenije, ZSMS), which was designed to bring young people together, 'activate' them in a social and political sense, prepare them for entry into politics, and instil in them the values of the system. As an institution it was guaranteed delegate positions and, in a more informal sense, enjoyed the status of a 'transmission organisation' within the constellation of social and political organisations, the basic purpose of which was to create cadres who would later enter the social and political life of the country. This began to change at the beginning of the 1980s, when the ZSMS embarked on a process of transforming itself and the role it had been assigned under the system. For the ZSMS, the 1980s saw an abandonment of the values of the post-war era in favour of links with civil society and the gradual assumption of the values that underpinned the various (new) social movements. It therefore became increasingly involved in issues around the peace movement, ecology, spiritual and sexual freedom, and political pluralism and economic liberalism. This mirrored the key concerns of progressive youth in other parts of the world.

### From then to now

With its broad organisational footing, the ZSMS in some sense provided the template for the structures that followed it. It operated in schools and universities, and in companies in which there were at least five active individuals aged 27 or under. The basic organisations came together in municipal organisations, with their leading members taking part in municipal conferences. Students and young university staff were organised within two university organisations, in Ljubljana and Maribor, and their leadership took part in university conferences. Apart from the republic (i.e. national) conference, these were the only social and political organisations that participated in high-level politics, on occasions as a kind of opposition to the republic conference. As the umbrella organisation that encompassed all lower forms of organisation, social organisations and youth societies/associations, the ZSMS was governed, in any period between two congresses, by the republic conference and its leadership bodies, including in individual areas of public policy. In addition to participating in formal structures, young people within the ZSMS were engaged in a variety of forms and methods of work: conferences organised to address specific issues, commissions, coordinating committees and centres, councils, student clubs, clubs for scholarship-holders, associations of young cooperative members, inter-municipal councils, territorial defence organisations, Model UN clubs and so on.

Although its status was that of a transmission organisation, by formal definition instrumentalised for the recruitment of future political cadres, the ZSMS began to shape itself into an independent organisation at the beginning of the 1980s. Working

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Blaž Vurnik's work on the ZSMS for much of the historical information in this introduction.

from within youth organisations, young people were, by this point, actively addressing political, social, economic and other major concerns. Their overarching demand was that young people be involved in the political system — a system that was denying them the political participation to which, in theory and principle, they were entitled. This shift was already becoming evident with the issue of 'guided education',<sup>2</sup> which gradually shaped the ZSMS into an organisation that sought to defend the interests of young people. Over time this graduated to a critique of the social, economic and political situation and to the idea of a 'front' organisation, which would eventually lead to the inclusion of new social movements. This was a highly resonant issue at several levels: first, it raised the question of competition within the political system; second, the ZSMS became a link between all forms of youth association and organisation. In turn this enabled a certain pluralism of interests to arise, along with the possibility of the membership throwing serious weight behind its support for the organisation. As new social movements emerged, the ZSMS slowly began to make political interventions of its own and to step up its activism. Issues concerning the social and economic position of young people came to the fore, particularly housing, scholarship policy, education and employment.

Nevertheless, the general direction of travel was towards the transformation of the ZSMS into a political party. Its statutes were amended to abolish automatic membership and divide the organisation into two parts: a political party and a student organisation. By becoming a political party, the ZSMS renounced its position as the umbrella youth organisation, which paved the way for the establishment of the National Youth Council of Slovenia, a non-political organisation designed to bring together all youth organisations and represent their interests. The ZSMS welcomed this initiative and conceived the role of the council as the 'other half of the so-called ministry of youth',<sup>3</sup> or as an institutional space in which its members could meet on a continuous basis and carry out projects in the interests of young people. However, this did not stop the National Youth Council setting up its own organisations of interest on 25 April 1990. Initiatives to establish a youth council came from all sides, and were also presented to the Slovenian parliament as a 'general call to all social and state institutions to support this form of participation by youth organisations'.<sup>4</sup>

The opening-up of the space to new ideas and organisational structures that took place in the 1980s brought the issue of the position of young people into political discourse and the arena of political ideas. It also meant that the 'youth dimension' became bound up with the independence process, in terms of the substance of that dimension and the broader issue of youth organisation, although the topic of youth was all but ignored at the first elections (Deželan and Matjašič, 2020). It was therefore clear that, for young people, political pluralism would bring with it the many pitfalls inherent in liberal democracy, one of the most important being the young population's numerical disadvantage in comparison with others (pensioners, for example). This continues to result in a lack of political interest in the problems that young people face.

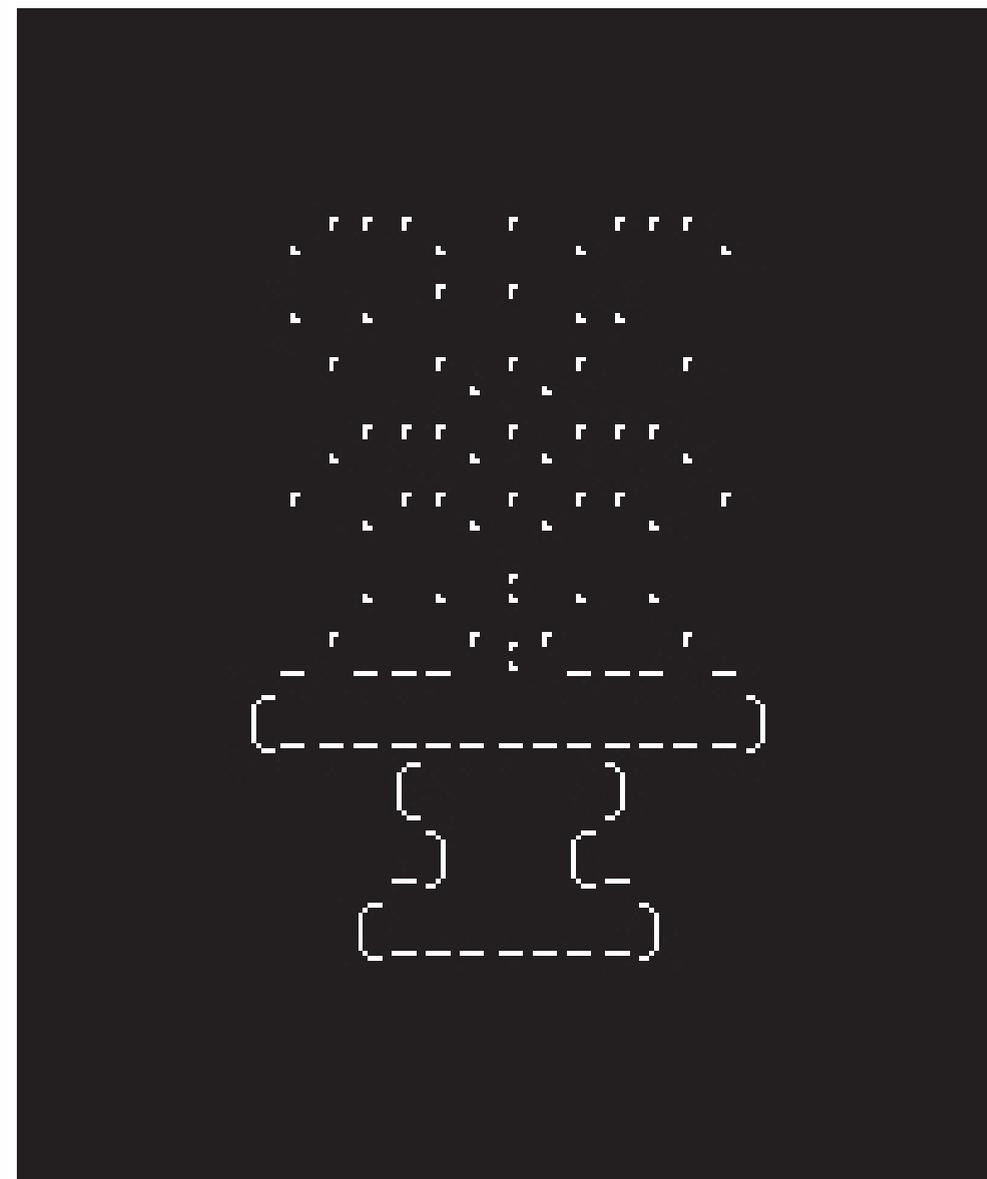
<sup>2</sup> Guided education (*usmerjeno izobraževanje*) was the system introduced into schools in Yugoslavia to address the perceived inequalities of the academic grammar school system.

<sup>3</sup> Informacija RK ZSMS No 38, 20 October 1989, 'K zasnovi nacionalnega združenja organizirane mladine, Mladinski svet' (Youth Council: Towards a national association of organised youth, see Vurnik, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> AS1115, no 1440, initiative of Tone Pavček, 7 March 1990 (see Vurnik, 2005).

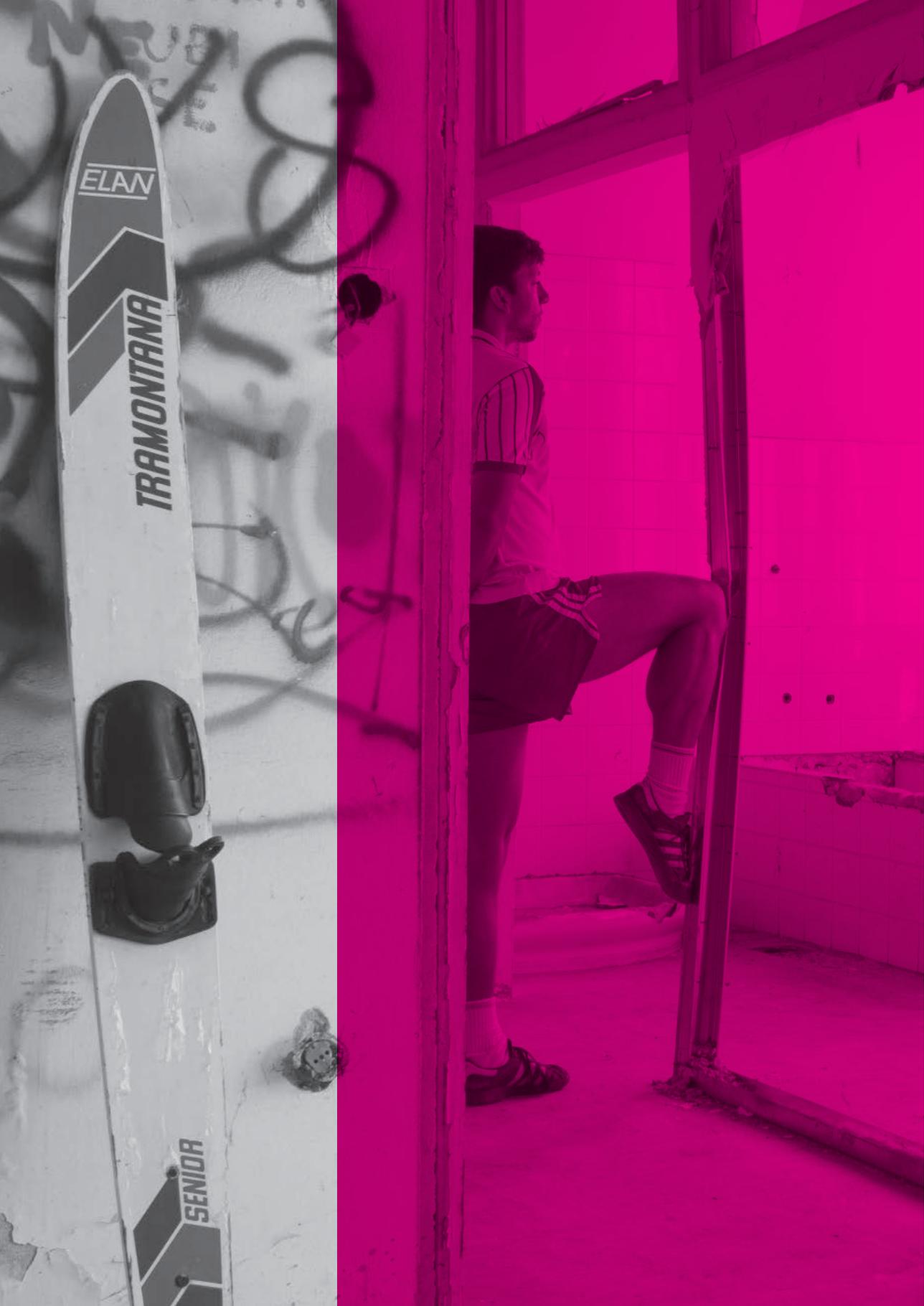
## Structure of the monograph

We start with a discussion of the three decades of development of youth policy in Slovenia, with Tin Kampl and Tomaž Deželan addressing the distance that has arisen over the years between what the regulations require and what actually happens on the ground. This is followed by a chapter on the Office for Youth, or the national authority as it is often referred to in the European Union and its programmes, by Andraž Zgonc Tin Kampl and Tomaž Deželan. The role and activities of the Office for Youth are further evidence of the strange gap between theory and practice in the youth field in Slovenia. There is then a discussion of the development of the youth sector as a whole (Tin Kampl and Tomaž Deželan), which highlights its diversity by examining all its prevailing forms. This repertoire of key youth-related areas is rounded off by Nina Vombergar and Tomaž Deželan in a discussion of youth work in Slovenia. Particular focus is placed on the factors that have led to its recognition and consolidation over the last few decades. We close with two important aspects of support for the youth sector: the creation of adequate financial and data-based foundations for the operation of the sector generally. Maja Drobne, Karolina Babič and Tomaž Deželan analyse the financial aspect with particular reference to the importance of European youth development programmes, while Tomaž Deželan, Katja Nacevski and Marko Majce address the data- or research-related aspect by examining the history of youth-centred research in Slovenia, the reference studies produced and the most important findings of those studies in terms of their significance for the youth field. In place of a conclusion, each chapter offers points for further consideration. These are designed to point the way forward towards well-informed, evidence-based action by the key stakeholders in the youth sector.



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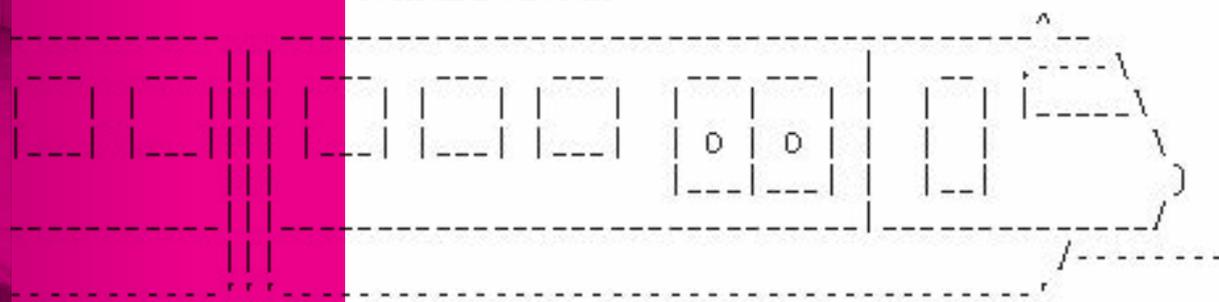


## Chapter 1

# Miles Between Theory and Practice

Three Decades  
of Youth Policy  
in Slovenia

**Tin Kampl**  
**Tomaž Deželan**



# Key milestones in the development of Youth policy in Slovenia

**1990:** National Youth Council of Slovenia founded

**1991:** Office for Youth founded

**2005:** Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy Until 2010

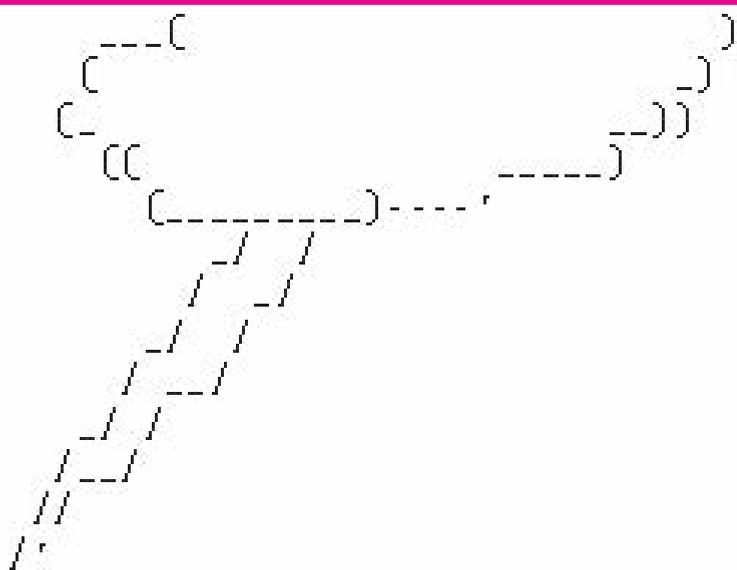
**2009:** Government Council for Youth founded

**2010:** Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act

**2011:** Results of the Mladina 2010 study published

**2013:** Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022

**2017:** First interim report published on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022



## Youth policy contexts in Slovenia

Youth policy is a distinct field that differs from other public policies in terms of type, but chiefly in terms of the range of principles on which it is based and the wide spectrum of impacts that it sets out to achieve. It is more than simply a public policy response to the specific challenges that need to be addressed in relation to young people, as it represents a clear commitment on the part of government to ensure good living conditions and opportunities for the young (Denstad, 2009). Generally speaking, youth policy addresses different and interconnected dimensions in the lives of young people, such as their welfare, education, democratic participation and inclusion. It can also offer young people the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they are able to find their place in society, be autonomous, play a role in civil society and enter the labour market (Youth Partnership, 2019).

Youth policy has evolved radically in recent decades to the point where it now addresses the wide range of risks and opportunities encountered by young people; this requires a broader strategy covering a variety of public policy domains (employment, social protection, formal and non-formal education, health, housing policy, culture, etc.) as well as transversal challenges such as social inclusion, youth participation and gender equality (Youth Partnership, 2019). However, it is important to note that there are considerable differences between countries; we cannot therefore talk of shared understandings of core terms such as 'youth policy', 'youth work' or even 'youth' itself, as the way these terms are understood can vary between countries and public policy fields (Taru, 2017).

It is also true that international organisations have had a strong impact on youth policy in many countries, often providing an important incentive for the systematic development of policy even before an awareness of the need for it developed within those countries themselves. Slovenia is one such country, as this chapter will show. Of course, this has also helped to establish a tendency towards an integrated approach to youth policy, one that is supported by many international organisations and associations (Kuhar and Leskošek, 2008). In Slovenia's case, the main organisations are the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

This chapter provides an overview of the development of Slovenian youth policy that pays due regard to the major role played by international organisations. It also attempts to define that role in more detail. Alongside this, we have taken as a guideline the key principles of good youth policy; this, we hope, will enable us to produce a balanced overview of the key developments as well as the missed opportunities.

## Key international starting points for Slovenian youth policy

While the first stirrings of youth policy can be traced as far back as the 19th century, when young people began to be seen as a distinct social category, modern youth policy ideas only properly emerged after the Second World War, in tandem with the development of the welfare state (Taru, 2017). Within international organisations, the first signs of an integrated (or cross-sectoral) youth policy began to appear at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. In Europe, the field of youth policy gained considerable momentum in the 1990s within the context of social, employment and economic policies that aimed to strengthen the international competitiveness of the EU; this also created a more general context for the development of cross-sectoral youth policy (ibid.). Youth policy initiatives have been significantly influenced by an

EU economic and social agenda whose main policy goal is the fight against poverty and social exclusion (Colley, in Taru, 2017).

Youth policy at the Council of Europe has had a different focus, emphasising youth participation at organisational, community and societal level, as well as the importance of democratic and civil society movements (Eberhard, 2002). Although the socio-economic integration of young people with vulnerable social backgrounds has not been the only goal set out in European documents, it has remained a central concern of European youth policy since the beginning of the 21st century (Taru, 2017). The EU and the Council of Europe have played an important role, not just at international level but also at the level of individual countries' youth policies, perhaps most obviously with the introduction of the 'open method of coordination'<sup>1</sup> at the turn of the millennium (ibid).

## European Union

Not all young people are students and it was only relatively recently, in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, that the EU began to insert the formal youth field into its general policies — even then, its efforts were modest, with a single reference in Article 126 of the Treaty on European Union to encouraging youth exchanges and exchanges of youth workers (or, as the Treaty calls them, 'socio-educational instructors'). That said, it did also provide (albeit indirectly) the basis for the development of youth policy at European level in a variety of fields relevant to young people, such as employment, the mobility of young researchers, culture, health and consumer protection (Debeljak, 2009). While it is possible to argue that youth-centred activities did start earlier than this, they tended to be limited solely to specific programmes, such as Youth for Europe, which the European Commission set in motion in 1988.

While acknowledging the foundations laid down by the Department for Education and Youth Policies operating from 1973, the breakthrough within the EU came with the Lisbon Strategy of 2000, which prioritised the development of human capital — and therefore of young people as well. This was followed by *A New Impetus for European Youth*, a White Paper that signalled the start of the accelerated development of the field in the years that followed. The White Paper proposed the institutionalisation of cooperation between Member States in the youth field by using the open method of coordination (OMC) in four priority areas (providing young people with information, participation, voluntary service and greater understanding of youth), and the strengthening of youth dimensions in other sectoral policies (education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, and tackling racism and xenophobia) (European Commission, 2001).

This was followed by two key documents that helped to rapidly consolidate the field: the European Youth Pact of 2005 and the Resolution on a Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010–2018, also known as the Renewed Framework) of 2009. The European Youth Pact was adopted by the European Council in 2005 as one of the key instruments for achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy. It obliged Member States to redouble their efforts in the fields of growth and jobs, and raised awareness of youth policy at EU level and of the importance of empowering young people to become independent. It also stressed the importance of youth participation, which later led to the establishment of the Structured Dialogue initiative. The Renewed

<sup>1</sup> The open method of coordination (OMC) is a form of intergovernmental policy-making that is not binding on Member States.

Framework, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2009, enhanced the framework for European cooperation in the youth field in place at that time, with the Council following the guidelines and proposals published by the European Commission in the spring of that year in the EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A Renewed Open Method of Coordination to Address Youth Challenges and Opportunities.

The core vision of the EU Strategy for Youth was to boost investment in young people by increasing funds for the development of areas that had an impact on young people and their welfare, and to strengthen the role of young people in renewing society; within this context, the Commission saw the renewed OMC as a tool for promoting the youth dimension in other sectoral policies and boosting participation. At the same time, the Renewed Framework provided for the use of instruments such as evidence-based public policymaking, mutual learning between Member States, progress reporting, and consultations and structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations (Council of the European Union, 2009). Further contributions to EU youth policy were made in the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in 2010. Based on seven flagship initiatives aimed at promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (including 'Youth on the Move'), it replaced the earlier Lisbon Strategy and was an attempt to enhance the performance of education systems and facilitate the entry of young people onto the labour market (Communication from the Commission, 2010). This signalled that the role of young people and youth policy was gaining greater weight within the EU's strategic policies.

The period since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy has been one of accelerated development for EU youth policy, resulting in a higher profile for that policy and the development of several instruments that have had an impact on the development of youth policy in the Member States themselves. This period has undoubtedly seen a radical change in how young people and youth policy are understood; it is also clear that the 'youth dimension' has also begun to be addressed within the framework of other sectoral policies. These are all important steps towards creating an integrated cross-sectoral youth policy.

The current EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which was adopted by the Council of the European Union at the end of 2018 and builds on the experiences and decisions of previous years, aims to tackle the existing and upcoming challenges that young people face, and to provide a framework of objectives, principles, priorities, core areas and measures for youth policy cooperation for all relevant stakeholders (Council of the European Union, 2018). It is split into three thematic sections (engagement, connection and empowerment), and is complemented by the European Youth Goals, which are the product of consultation with young people within the Structured Dialogue process. To help realise the EU Youth Strategy, a number of instruments are set out that enhance those contained in the Renewed Framework: evidence-based youth policy-making and knowledge-building; mutual learning and dissemination; participatory governance; the mobilisation of EU programmes and funds; the Future National Activities Planner; Youth Dialogue (previously known as Structured Dialogue); an EU Youth Coordinator; Youth Information and Support; three-year EU Work Plans for Youth; monitoring, reporting and evaluation; and Mid-Term Reviews.

## Council of Europe

The Council of Europe began to address the youth field in 1972 with the establishment of the ad hoc intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Youth Questions and the organisation of the first Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Youth in 1985 (eight such conferences took place between that year and 2012). Based on the conference discussions, the Youth Department has developed a range of instruments and programmes aimed at promoting and supporting youth policy development within the Council of Europe and the Member States (Siurala, 2006). These instruments include reviews of national youth policies that are designed to support other countries in their efforts to develop their own. In addition to providing support, the reviews have also sought to identify those common characteristics of national youth policies that would make it possible to establish a European approach to the youth policy field, and contribute to mutual learning within the context of the development, formulation and delivery of youth policy (Cink, 2016). These efforts have been continued through one of the most recent youth policy development instruments presented by the Council of Europe, the Self-Assessment Tool for Youth Policy, which was created to help Member States assess the compliance of their national youth policies with the Council's own youth policy standards. The Council of Europe's basic youth policy standards, upon which the tool is based, proceed from its basic values and from a broader understanding of youth policy. They address the fields of active cooperation, information, the promotion of inclusion, mobility, access to rights by young people and high-quality youth work (see Council of Europe, 2021).

Of all the Council of Europe instruments that operate on a continuous basis and make an important contribution to youth policy development at both Council and Member State levels, particular mention should be made of the relevant co-governing bodies active in the youth field and within which national authorities and representatives of youth organisations, as well as young people themselves, make joint decisions on youth policy within the Council of Europe: the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, the European Youth Foundation, and partnerships with the European Commission in the youth field.

The Council of Europe's overarching document, one that summarises previous developments and achievements in youth policy and sets policies going forward, is the Youth Sector Strategy 2030 (COEYSS), which was adopted in 2019. The mission set out in this document is to broaden youth participation, strengthen young people's access to rights, and deepen youth knowledge (Council of Europe, 2020). Within the COEYSS, the Council of Europe has established a range of priorities that it wishes to address through instruments already in place; these include revitalising pluralistic democracy, young people's access to rights, living together in peaceful and inclusive societies, and youth work (ibid.).

## United Nations

The United Nations is, of course, one of the most prominent international organisations active in the youth field; and while its processes cannot be said to have had a direct and decisive impact on the development of youth policy in Slovenia, they have nevertheless left their mark on the international environment in the form of guidelines. The UN began to address youth-related issues back in 1965, when Member States adopted the Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples, with a major step forward towards the

Cink is wrong.

1985?  
Council of Europe

systematic development of youth policy coming 20 years later in 1985, which the UN General Assembly proclaimed as International Youth Year. This aimed to draw attention to the important role young people played in society, and to promote national youth policies that were cross-sectoral and integrated (Nico, 2017).

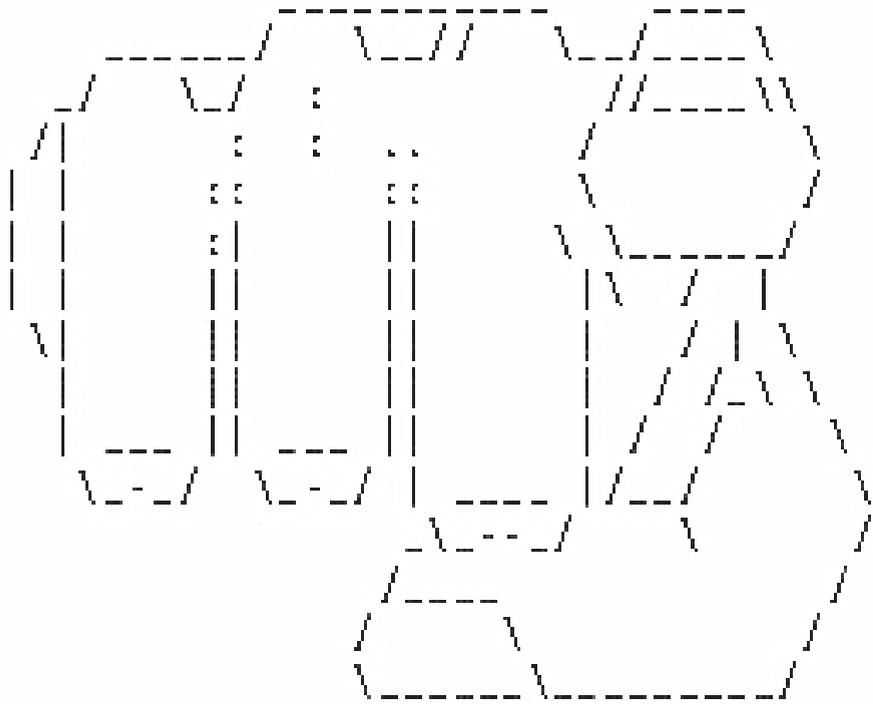
The themes identified by the UN General Assembly for International Youth Year ('Participation, Development, Peace') reflected a predominant concern of the international community with distributive justice, popular participation and quality of life. These themes were also reflected in the guidelines, and were installed as the overarching themes of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY) (United Nations, 2010). In its action plan, the UN built on its efforts to foster the development of youth policy, defining the framework and guidelines for the formulation of youth policy at global and national level. This made it the first global initiative to plan effective national youth policies (Cink, 2016). The plan encouraged Member States to create and adopt integrated youth policies, and to engage in the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the position of young people by putting in place cross-sectoral programmes and measures with clear, time-determined objectives and the systematic monitoring of progress (ibid.).

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon focused heavily on young people during his time in office, and his efforts bore fruit with the adoption of the Youth-SWAP document (2013), the main aim of which was to enhance the coherence of the UN's system-wide activities in key youth-related areas, and to present a blueprint for identifying the major priorities of the UN's system as they related to youth (United Nations, 2013). The first Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth was also appointed in 2013, followed the year after by the first Global Forum on Youth Policies. This took place in Baku and featured a broad range of participants.

## Principles of good youth policy as a conceptual starting point

Youth policy is the means by which a country works to improve the position of young people, empower them and ensure that they are fully involved in society. It also provides an insight into how the state and its decision-makers understand young people — indeed, one of the central characteristics of a well-functioning youth policy is whether the state regards young people as a resource or as a problem. While this might appear to be just another political cliché, it is a dichotomy with significant presence in perceptions of youth policy (Denstad, 2009). In turn, it leads us to a series of important questions: whether youth policy is a mainstream or marginal component of public policy, for example, and whether its approach is synchronised or segmented (Williamson, 2002). Understanding youth policy as a problem-oriented field means perceiving young people as requiring of protection through public policies because of their vulnerable and endangered position; at the same time, they are seen as 'trouble-makers'. Youth policy therefore tends to target specific segments of the youth population, with very little (if any) coordination between different sectors. This is also reflected in practice in the tendency for countries to use measures to respond to individual challenges as they arise.

By contrast, the approach that views youth as a resource steers youth policy towards ensuring the active participation of all young people, and searching for ways of empowering them so that they realise their full potential. This type of youth policy is more proactive, and more keenly felt and appreciated by young people themselves.



The key areas in this approach are education and the provision of support to young people to become active citizens (Kuhar and Leskošek, 2008). This type of youth policy also helps young people lead lives appropriate to their age group, encourages independence and critical thinking, and aims to foster an integrated cross-sectoral governmental approach towards young people and their needs and challenges (Denstad, 2009).

One of the features specific to youth policy is its inter- or cross-sectoral nature, as it cuts across many other fields of public policy (Rakar et al., 2011). Youth policy is not only a collection of actions by different sectors that affect young people, but a deliberate and structured inter-sectoral policy of the youth sector, which cooperates with other sectors and coordinates services for young people (Kuhar and Leskošek, 2008). We can understand the word 'sector' in the context of youth policy in two ways: as a public policy sector or area (e.g. education, employment, health) or as a sector in the wider social sense (e.g. the public sector, the non-governmental sector, the economic sector). Within the context of European youth policy, 'sector' is usually thought of in the first sense, i.e. as relating to different policy sectors, to different ministries or to different departments within ministries, although it is also used in the latter sense in certain contexts (Taru, 2017). We can add yet another dimension, where 'cross-sectoral youth policy' may also refer to vertical cooperation — between central government and municipalities, for example (ibid.). When we look at the different approaches to youth policy in Europe, it becomes clear that it is understood to be much more than youth policy per se, and that it has to take part in, communicate, encompass, integrate or lead a set of coordinated plans, measures, programmes and policies that are, generally speaking, the formal or legal responsibility of other sectors.

Owing to the cross-sectoral nature of youth policy, it is therefore also important to have a clearly defined and established government authority on youth responsible for coordinating the development of a national youth policy (Denstad, 2009). This authority, which can be organised as an independent ministry or some other governmental body, must be recognised and have strong links with ministries if coordination and cooperation are to be successful.

As we have already pointed out, one of the most important attributes of a youth policy that regards young people as a resource is youth participation through the entire public policy process — that is, in both the development and delivery of youth policy. Young people should have the right, means, support, opportunities and space to participate as partners in youth policy, advising or deciding jointly on its design, contributing to youth policy service delivery, and monitoring and evaluating the impacts of the policies. They should not merely be seen as 'beneficiaries' of services (Youth Partnership, 2019). There is a broad set of reasons why youth participation in the public policy process should be encouraged; they range from viewing young people as a resource to the fact that there are formalistic and legal reasons why young people should be natural partners in decision-making — for example, to keep the promises made by governments when they sign up to international agreements and charters (Denstad, 2009). Of course, any discussion about encouraging participation should mention the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 of which addresses children's participation in government decisions that affect them, as well as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, which was adopted in 2003 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, one of the pillars of the Council of Europe (ibid.). One further reason for encouraging youth participation is worth highlighting here: that where young people are involved, policymakers are better able to identify and, with the help of those young people, understand the needs and challenges of the young. They also acquire the necessary legitimacy for their decisions and, by involving young people in decision-making, take ownership of those decisions together with them. This can help to ensure that the policies are delivered more effectively (ibid.).

Non-governmental youth organisations that enjoy strong recognition and support from policymakers have an important role to play in youth policy (Denstad, 2009). As civil society organisations that bring large numbers of young people together, youth organisations are defined as autonomous democratic voluntary associations whose operations enable young people to create planned and unplanned learning experiences, formulate and express their positions, and carry out activities in accordance with their interests and their cultural, sectoral or political orientations (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2010). Youth organisations that involve young people and are part of the wider public policy process have shown themselves to be more than capable of addressing and overcoming the problems of disconnected youth, general apathy and the absence of adequate representation of young people's interests (Rakar et al., 2011). In most European countries, youth councils are a key point of contact between youth organisations and the interests of young people, and are designed to occupy a privileged position as a partner to political decision-makers in the development and delivery of youth policies. Because of the importance of youth participation, youth policy must recognise the (non-governmental) youth sector and its organisations, as well as young people themselves, and design and carry out measures and programmes that encourage young people to become engaged and active citizens and

to take responsibility for helping to create society (Denstad, 2009). At the same time, political decision-makers should be aware that not all young people are involved in youth organisations, and give an opportunity for those young people to be consulted when youth policies are being designed. One mechanism that directly involves young people in the consultation process is Youth Dialogue (formerly Structured Dialogue), which enables young people, youth organisations, youth councils and researchers in the youth field to become actively involved in political dialogue with those responsible for youth policy.

Another important feature of a high-quality youth policy is a concrete and transparent strategy capable of analysing and addressing the youth population's most pressing issues as effectively as possible. This can be achieved with clearly established and defined objectives, and measures to support their achievement. The objectives must be set out in such a way as to enable long-, medium- and short-term scrutiny of their implementation, with mechanisms in place to ensure a prompt response in the event of any shortcomings in delivery; where possible, they should also be equipped with appropriate indicators that allow them to be monitored and measured. The transparency of the strategy is reflected in the clearly defined responsibilities of the youth policy coordinator and those responsible for individual measures, as well as in the link between objectives on the one hand and measures on the other (Denstad, 2009). By being transparent, we also ensure that there is accountability towards young people.

If the objectives and measures of youth policy are to be formulated in a way that addresses the actual needs of young people, they must be supported by adequate data. An evidence- and knowledge-based youth policy comprises two dimensions — research/scientific knowledge and practical/experiential knowledge — which are of equal importance to policy development (Denstad, 2009). In addition to the requirement for relevant knowledge and evidence to be deployed in youth policy design, data and research on the youth field needs to be collected so that the policies can be regularly monitored and evaluated. This offers the only tangible way in which the success (or otherwise) of specific measures and programmes can be evaluated.

## Development of youth policy in Slovenia

The beginnings of youth policy in Slovenia can be traced back to around the time of the country's independence in 1991, which is when the Office for Youth (Urad RS za mladino, URSM) was founded and a start made on addressing the position of young people in Slovenia within the context of national policies and institutions. The National Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije, MSS) had been established the year before as the country's umbrella youth organisation, assuming the role of advocate of the interests of youth organisations in their dealings with political decision-makers. If we look back at the last three decades of youth policy in Slovenia, we can see that it has developed at different levels of intensity in different periods of time and has, as we pointed out at the beginning, been under the influence of the international organisations of which Slovenia is part. Generally speaking, we can divide this 30-year period into the period before Slovenia's accession to the EU, the period of accession, the period immediately after accession (when important steps were taken towards adopting a law on the public interest in the youth sector and a national programme) and the period that followed the adoption of the national programme.

## Early impact of the Council of Europe

In the 1990s youth policy in Slovenia was heavily influenced by the Council of Europe, whose operations in the youth field were joined by the Office for Youth in 1992, when Slovenia became a State Party to the European Cultural Convention. The Office had been founded in 1991 in response to initiatives from three committees of the Slovenian Assembly during discussions on the draft Youth Councils Act (Škulj, 2016). After 1992 it began taking part in the activities of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), which comprised ministries and other bodies responsible for youth. The CDEJ was designed to foster cooperation between governments in the youth sector, and provide a framework for comparing national youth policies, exchanging best practices and drafting standard-setting texts (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The Office's participation in the CDEJ has had an impact on youth policy in Slovenia in substantive, organisational and administrative terms. The administrative impact has come chiefly in the context of the management model established at Council of Europe level and its introduction into Slovenia with the setting-up of the Joint Commission for Youth Affairs (Mešana komisija za mladinska vprašanja), which was the co-management body comprising representatives of youth organisations (National Youth Council) on the one side and central government representatives (Office for Youth) on the other. In this context, the commission was the predecessor of today's Government Council for Youth (Svet Vlade RS za mladino, SVM). At the substantive level, participation in the Council of Europe's working and other bodies led the Office to focus more heavily on providing information and advice to young people (Škulj, 2016).

The Office for Youth then set about building on its earlier work in these two areas with the publication of an information and counselling plan for young people, which was based on the Council of Europe's Recommendation to Member States Concerning Information and Counselling for Young People in Europe (1990), the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (1992) and the European Youth Information Charter, which was adopted in 1993 by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERIYCA) (Cink, 2016). Youth mobility has been another area of focus for the Council of Europe, one that has been developed mainly through the European Youth Card, which Slovenia joined in 1999 by signing the Council of Europe's Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility Through the Youth Card. Responsibility for introducing the card was assumed by a non-governmental partner, originally Zavod MOVIT and, from 2010, Zavod MOBIN (which later became the SLOAM Youth Agency).

The first step towards the legislative regulation of youth policy and the youth sector was taken in 2000 with the adoption of the Youth Councils Act (Zakon o mladinskih svetih), which regulated the position, operations, activities and financing of the national and local community youth councils. The need for the law had arisen as a result of the unregulated status and legal personality of the National Youth Council, which was affecting its ability to draw on budget funds.<sup>2</sup> The legislation in force at the time did not give the National Youth Council the option of acquiring legal personality, mainly because of the links between member organisations organised under the provisions of the Societies Act and those subject to the Political Parties Act, as it also included youth wings of political parties (Škulj, 2016). To bridge these legal gaps, youth councils

<sup>2</sup> The National Youth Council found itself in a critical position after funds on its account were blocked — indeed, its bank account was even closed at one point following its deletion from the register.

were established as legal entities sui generis. The legislator also pointed out, as the basic reason for the adoption of the law, that children and young people who were organised within different organisations and formed a youth council would now be able to determine, express and implement joint positions and activities, thereby enjoying a more suitable status as an organised form of expression of the common interests of the participating youth organisations in the public sphere (Report on the Draft Youth Councils Act, 2000). The law therefore instructed the government, ministries and other central government and local community authorities to inform the National Youth Council or local community youth councils before setting out draft laws and other regulations with a direct impact on the life and work of young people (Youth Councils Act, 2000, Article 6). However, apart from regulating the position of youth councils, the Youth Councils Act failed to make any inroads into the broader field of youth policy and the youth sector, nor did it establish any of the related definitions that would have allowed this to happen.

## **EU accession and the beginnings of the systematic regulation of youth policy**

The breakthrough in the regulation of youth policy in Slovenia, also infused by the insights of the recent Council of Europe's Advisory mission, came in 2005 with the publication of the Office for Youth's Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy Until 2010 (Strategija Urada RS za mladino na področju mladinske politike do leta 2010). This was the first comprehensive document to regulate youth policy in Slovenia, define the basic terms and set out the key youth policy areas, with goals, measures and programmes for individual areas aimed at improving the conditions for youth work. At its core, it contained measures and programmes in the vertical youth policy field, i.e. those fields specific to young people and youth work, although its vision for the future development of youth policy encompassed the development of a horizontal youth policy as well. This was reflected chiefly in the fundamental strategic objectives for youth policy in Slovenia set out in the Strategy (Office for Youth, 2005), which contained, inter alia, the requirement 'to incorporate youth policy into all national policies whose strategies, national programmes or legal frameworks specifically also address the youth population'. The Strategy therefore also established vertical and horizontal axes for the formulation and delivery of youth policy by stating that while the horizontal level included measures that were otherwise an integral part of other policies, the state was particularly keen to introduce special measures to create incentives to make it easier for young people to integrate into society (housing policy, employment policy, etc.). The vertical axis included measures that were essentially specific to young people and aimed at promoting their involvement in youth work, putting in place the conditions for youth work, and laying the foundations for a determination of objectives and measures in the youth policy field (ibid.).

The Office for Youth set itself the task of boosting the quality and profile of youth work in Slovenia, strengthening links between different youth work entities, and increasing the mobility of knowledge, ideas and people (Office for Youth, 2005). The political and substantive premises of the Strategy were provided by several basic Slovenian and European documents and processes, chief among them the European Youth Pact and the European Commission's White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth. The Strategy for Youth was also the first Slovenian document to provide comprehensive definitions of some of the basic terms in the field, including 'youth',

'youth work', 'youth policy', 'youth organisation' and 'organisation for work with young people', and defined the factors (key actors) of youth policy at national and local level. At national level, these were the National Youth Council of Slovenia, the coordinators of various different fields (Zavod MOVIT, Zavod MISSS, MaMa Youth Network), youth organisations and organisations for work with young people; at local level, they included youth centres, local community youth councils, local youth organisations, youth initiatives and local youth committees (ibid.). That the Strategy represented the start of the comprehensive and systematic regulation of the youth sector and youth policy in Slovenia is also confirmed by the fact that the Office defined it as a 'living' document designed to serve as a platform for continuous public discussion, and encourage a higher degree of social consensus on its objectives and greater cooperation in its realisation. Judging by its impact on youth policy today, the Strategy for Youth has met its objective of initiating a discussion on the development of youth policy.

## *Formulation and adoption of the umbrella law*

The first steps that followed the realisation of the objectives of the Strategy for Youth after its adoption in 2005 were taken in the same year when the process of drafting an umbrella law on youth was initiated. In September 2005 the Office for Youth commissioned the preparation of a comparative law analysis and the drafting of a law designed to systemically regulate youth policy and youth work from the NGO legal information centre (PIC). The Office set up a working group to provide support to the work of the PIC comprising representatives from the Office, a representative from the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia, and representatives from the PIC and National Youth Council (Rakar et al., 2011). The comparative law analysis and the theses for the law compiled by the PIC were discussed by the working group in March 2006. Agreement was reached on certain amendments and additions, which the PIC inserted and then sent to the Office. As agreed with the working group, the Office presented the theses to the ministry in charge, and then forwarded them to youth sector organisations for discussion. The first draft of the law was produced in autumn 2006 and was discussed at a consultation organised by the Office. However, the draft did not gain support, which brought the process to a complete halt (Rakar et al., 2011). The National Youth Council attempted to revive the process in 2007 with the preparation of its own proposed law ('Mladina je zakon', Youth Rules), but no further progress was made.

The process was revived again in 2008, when it received support from the newly established governing coalition that arose following the general election. At the initiative of its junior partners (Rakar et al., 2011), the coalition inserted the following commitment into the coalition agreement: that a law on youth work and youth policy would be adopted to provide the basis for a national programme in the youth field; that the Office for Youth would be transferred from the Ministry of Education and Sport to become a government office, and would be tasked with the inter-departmental coordination of issues of concern to young people; and that a Slovenian Government Council for Youth Issues would be established (Coalition Agreement, 2008) On the basis of new findings and past experiences with legislative preparations, the position was taken to formulate a law that would be as narrow as possible (in order to ensure the necessary consensus), but still sufficient to provide the foundation for the drafting of a national youth programme (Rakar et al., 2011). In parallel with the preparation of the draft law, the Government Council for Youth was set up in 2009. At its first meeting,

it discussed the draft and issued a decision authorising the National Youth Council to lead a preliminary discussion within the youth sector in cooperation with the Office for Youth to gather comments on the law (ibid.). On the basis of the comments received at the consultations, the Office, together with the working group, drew up a new draft law, the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju), which was approved unanimously by the Government Council for Youth in November 2009. The draft law underwent some minor changes when it reached the government, and was sent to the National Assembly for discussion at the beginning of 2010. After receiving broad parliamentary support, it was passed unanimously on 18 May 2010.

Although the legislators had gone for the narrower option, the law did nevertheless represent an important breakthrough in the development of youth policy, the youth sector and youth work in Slovenia by comprehensively establishing a normative framework for the youth field. Most importantly of all, the public interest act provided a basis for the adoption of a national youth programme, the need for which arose from the realisation that the Office for Youth's strategy in force at the time was having limited impact. What was needed was the targeted integration of the wider field of the 'state' and the inclusion of more ministries if broader impacts were to be achieved and the youth sector developed (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act [Draft], 2010). To ensure that the youth field matched the international context and the processes taking place at international level closely as possible, the legislators examined and considered various strategic policies and documents produced by international institutions, in particular the EU and the Council of Europe. They included the Recommendation to Member States Concerning Information and Counselling for Young people in Europe, adopted in 1990 by the Council of Europe; the UN Convention on the Rights the Child; the European Commission White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth of 2001, which laid down the framework for cooperation in the youth field; the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, which was adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; the European Youth Information Charter (ERYICA); the Rotterdam Declaration; Recommendations on the European Commission's Proposals Regarding the Youth in Action 2007–2013 Programme; the European Youth Pact; and the Revised Lisbon Strategy.

The law defined the youth sector and the public interest in the youth sector, identified the actors and entities operating within the youth sector, and the youth sector bodies and their powers, laid down the conditions and procedures for acquiring the status of organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector, provided a framework definition of the role of self-governing local communities in the youth sector, and laid the groundwork for a binding strategic document, the National Youth Programme (NPM), which was required to contain strategic objectives, and measures for the achievement of those objectives, and to form the basis for the co-financing of youth sector programmes. The public interest act defined the basic terms, including 'youth policy', which became 'the coordinated set of measures of different sectoral public policies aimed at encouraging and easing the integration of young people into the economic, cultural and political life of the community, and appropriate support mechanisms for the development of youth work and the operation of youth organisations run in cooperation with autonomous and democratic representative representatives of youth organisations and with professional and other organisations' (Public

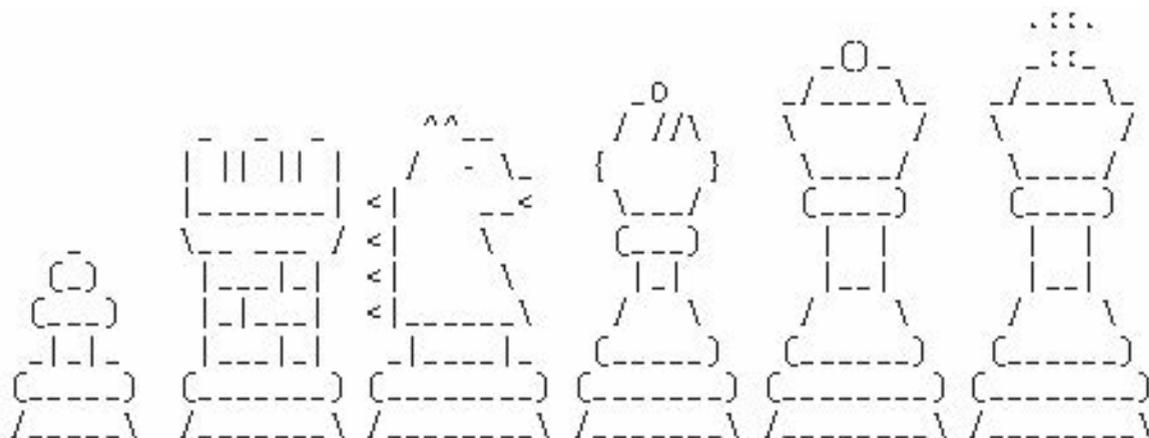


Images from Theory and Practice

Interest in the Youth Sector Act, 2010, Article 3). The definition was formulated in a comprehensive way, one that incorporated the whole spectrum of measures that take place within vertical and horizontal youth policy. Horizontal youth policy therefore involved a coordinated set of policies of different ministries aimed at effectively and successfully integrating young people into society (e.g. employment, education, housing policy, culture), while vertical youth policy comprised measures specific to young people and youth work.

### National Youth Programme

As the basic programming document setting out the youth sector priorities and measures deemed to be in the public interest (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, 2010, Article 16), the National Youth Programme is one of the most important elements of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act and of the drive to ensure comprehensive regulation of the position of young people within society (as the definition of 'youth policy' suggested). At its core, the Programme demonstrates this ambition by seeking to ensure the coordinated introduction of a uniform and transparently arranged system of inter-departmental priorities and measures designed to improve conditions and address the problems highlighted by analyses, research and public discussions. It is a horizontal programme, which means that it brings together measures from areas that lie within the remit of different ministries with the aim of creating new value and ensuring that measures are coordinated and visible (Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022, 2013). The Programme's contents are determined in detail by the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (2010, Article 16), which requires it to contain programmes, financial plans (with an indication of costs and funding sources), the people and organisations responsible for delivery, the expected development effects and the indicators used to measure those effects, and the periods and deadlines for delivery of the programme. The National Youth Programme is adopted for a nine-year period by the National Assembly, following a proposal by the government. To enable detailed implementation, the government is required to adopt delivery plans in accordance with the central government budget, while individual ministries are responsible for delivering the Programme and the planned measures. The government is also required to present an interim report on Programme delivery and an evaluation of the results to the National Assembly every three years, as well as a final report at the end of the Programme (ibid.).



When the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act was passed, it was expected that the National Youth Programme would be adopted within 18 months of the entry into force of the law. However, there were delays to its formulation and final adoption, and the first Programme was not adopted until October 2013 (for the period up to 2022). The process of drafting the 2013–2022 Programme nevertheless began in 2009 with an intensive study of young people in Slovenia; this was because it first required the production of expert background documents based on the facts pertaining to young people, along with some indication of their real needs. A start was therefore made on promoting and financing analyses and research (Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022, 2013). In 2009 the Social Protection Institute (Inštitut RS za socialno varstvo) compiled an analysis titled *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo – Analiza položaja mladih v Sloveniji 2009* (Between Childhood and Adulthood – An Analysis of the Position of Young People in Slovenia 2009), while the Statistical Office produced the first comprehensive statistical overview of young people (*Mladi v Sloveniji, Young People in Slovenia*). An analysis titled *Matrika ukrepov državnih organov na področju mladinske politike* (Matrix of Measures of State Authorities in the Field of Youth Policy) was produced in 2010 with the aim of evaluating the success of public policies in resolving the specific problems faced by young people. The same year saw the appearance of an analytical study, *Mladinsko delo in mladinska politika na lokalni ravni* (Youth Work and Youth Policy at Local Level), which sought to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the organisational status of the youth sector at local level, the instruments in place for supporting youth work and the standards of locally based youth policy in the light of the creation of the National Youth Programme. Probably the most important document in this set was the *Mladina 2010* (Youth 2010) study, which enabled national youth programmes to be based on scientific findings, and provided answers to key questions regarding changes among young people in Slovenia since 2000 (and also after that year), as well as several points of international comparison.

In contrast to the Office for Youth's previous strategy, the National Youth Programme was much more heavily focused on delivering both horizontal and vertical youth policy, as demonstrated by the guidelines on which it is based and the areas it covers: education, employment and enterprise, the living conditions of young people, health and well-being, young people and society, the importance of the youth sector, and culture, creativity, heritage and the media. With the public interest act and then the National Youth Programme, Slovenia therefore took a major step towards addressing the position of young people via an integrated and cross-sectoral youth policy.

### Gap between theory and practice

The regulation of youth policy in Slovenia at the normative level is well-aligned with the international standards that constitute the reference framework for development of the field. The specificity of this youth policy requires consistency in its formulation and delivery; only in this way can it be successful and effective. Below we offer an overview of the successes of Slovenian youth policy in realising some of the key attributes of good youth policy (strategic approach, cross-sectoral character and the involvement of young people themselves), as well as an insight into relationships between the national and local levels and their respective responsibilities in relation to youth policy. Other attributes of a successful youth policy, such as adequate management and an evidence-based approach, are covered elsewhere in this book (for example, in the chapters on the Office for Youth, research in the youth field and the youth sector).

## Strategic approach to youth policy

A high-quality youth policy requires a concrete and transparent strategy capable of analysing and addressing the youth population's most pressing issues as effectively as possible. The method by which youth policy is regulated in Slovenia, via an umbrella law and a strategic document in the form of a national programme, is completely aligned with this approach, as the establishment of a legal basis has enabled the normative conditions to be put in place for a systemic and strategic approach towards youth policy. The National Youth Programme enables Slovenia to pursue all the steps in this process, from analysing the position of and consulting young people, to monitoring, delivering and evaluating the programme. Evaluation of the Programme, which takes place every three years, has also revealed its strategic nature, as evident from the impact it has had on the development of youth policy. The Programme has had an important effect on the way young people are understood within public policymaking and delivery processes, and raised the awareness of key stakeholders of the specific needs and interests of this group. It has placed young people on the administrative and political agenda, and made an essential contribution by increasing the profile of this important target group. This in turn has led to a greater levels of involvement on the part of young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the various measures in this field (Deželan, 2020).

However, the National Youth Programme has been slightly less successful when it comes to monitoring and measuring the achievement of its objectives. At certain points, the performance indicators do not enable realistic measurements to be carried out (because they are not backed up by mechanisms that systematically collect the necessary data), and the delivery of commitments varies from department to department, especially where areas are covered by multiple departments. The National Youth Council has also drawn attention to the lack of an adequate mechanism for monitoring the delivery of measures, pointing out that such a mechanism was envisaged in the framework guidelines for the National Youth Programme (guidelines that have not yet been implemented). The National Youth Council believes that no system yet exists for measuring how successful the Programme's measures are, or the extent to which the position of young people has improved as a result of them (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2020).

## Cross-sectoral character of youth policy

*In practice, youth policy cuts across a large number of areas and is in no way connected simply to youth organisations per se. Youth policy is connected to young people, and young people are present in all spheres of public and private life. Therefore, when we talk about youth policy, we are talking about a policy that encompasses all spheres of society. This means that we must approach it in that way. In practice, it is an explicitly inter-sectoral policy and must be conducted as such (Tadej Beočanin, interview, 15 April 2021).<sup>3</sup>*

The first references to horizontal youth policy can be found in the Office for Youth's strategy of 2005, which defined youth policy as having vertical and horizontal aspects. However, the lack of an appropriate legal basis for the strategy meant that it could not itself have the status of a publicly recognised horizontal strategic document; consequently, its final version was explicitly vertical in nature and of a highly internal

<sup>3</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

character. With the arrival of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, youth policy came together within a single framework, although even that law originally addressed the regulation of vertical youth policy — a pragmatic decision taken to ensure that it would be passed. Nevertheless, Article 5, which addressed the public interest in the youth sector, did make reference to the regulation of horizontal youth policy, i.e. a policy that had an impact on other sectoral policies as well. The public interest was to be realised through the incorporation of youth-related issues into strategies, policies and measures that affected the lives of young people.

With the National Youth Programme addressing horizontal youth policy in more detail and the public interest act at least referring to it, an important chapter was opened for youth policy in Slovenia: here was the first systemic opportunity the country had had to develop a horizontal youth policy that emphasised its cross-sectoral character. The first step was to raise the awareness of all relevant parties of the cross-sectoral challenges facing young people, which was achieved with the help of research and with support for capacity-strengthening provided primarily at international level. One former director of the Office for Youth, Peter Debeljak, believes that fundamental shifts took place at that time that have had an impact on the subsequent development of youth policy in Slovenia. He pointed out that this period was heavily marked by a consideration of other youth policies within the EU, as well as by the availability of funds for this purpose from the EU. Debeljak also acknowledges the important shift in mentality that occurred in Slovenian youth policy, 'from activism to the bureaucratic and systemic regulation of the youth policy field' (interview, 10 May 2021).

However, despite the positive prospects that attended the development of a horizontal youth policy and were heralded by the adoption of the public interest act and the National Youth Programme, cross-sectoral cooperation continues to face major challenges today. Debeljak highlights the lack of an adequate system for funding such policies; and since this approach is not rewarded with budget funds, the success of horizontal policy is, to a large degree, dependent on political interests, whether they are in favour of such an approach or not (Debeljak, interview, 10 May 2021). That political interests can play a decisive role in the development of youth policy in Slovenia is demonstrated by the fact that key shifts have taken place in periods when political parties and politicians have acknowledged the policy and made it one of their priorities. Nowhere was this clearer than in the coalition agreement for Borut Pahor's government, which prioritised the adoption of the public interest act and the National Youth Programme and the establishment of the Government Council for Youth. Certain similar shifts in importance could also be seen later — during Alenka Bratušek's government, for example, when the idea was mooted of appointing a state secretary for young people and making the Office for Youth a government-level authority, although this idea did not come to fruition at that time. As Tadej Beočanin pointed out in an interview on 15 April 2021:

*We [...] have not gathered enough energy and have missed the opportunity to unite around an individual who would perform this function. I remember what the prime minister said at the time: that we should sort it out and that she would be happy to appoint someone. But logically, this ran up against the same political obstacles as existed in central government policy as a whole, and we were unable to coalesce around someone whose appointment could then be proposed to the prime minister.*

Miro Cerar's government also paid a certain degree of attention to the field, organising a special government session at which youth organisation representatives were invited to put forward their proposals. However, this failed to have any major impact on the development of youth policy itself. The importance of political interests is also confirmed by Tine Radinja, mayor of Škofja Loka and former president of the European Youth Forum, who had this to say in an interview on 9 April 2021:

*[E]verything depends on politics in Slovenia. It seems to me that this area has been undervalued by politicians. Only rarely have national politicians come up with a vision or with ideas of what to do with youth work and youth policy. But basically, we're lucky in Slovenia because youth organisations and youth workers have built 'from the bottom up', so that we can now talk about a youth policy in Slovenia.*

In practice, the lack of inter-departmental cooperation and the poor understanding of the inter-sectoral dimension of youth policy are evident from the fact that when 'theories of action from other sectoral policies and their related instruments encroach on the measures themselves, the programme is shown to be an instrument with limited reach. At best it intersects with other sectoral public policy mechanisms, at worst it is in direct conflict with them' (Deželan, 2020). The National Youth Programme can, at several points, be understood as the glue that binds together specific sectoral policies and measures that also pursue their own objectives and their own logic of delivery, reporting and evaluation — and that only find themselves in the Programme as a result of a lack of vision in addressing the challenges that young people face and a lack of funding for the creation of new measures (Deželan, 2020; Debeljak, interview, 10 May 2021). The National Youth Council also highlights a lack of cooperation, both between ministries and with other stakeholders (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2020):

*In recent years, young people have been inserted into horizontal policies and at least partly included in the priorities of other ministries, which can be seen as a positive thing. At the same time, individual ministries give the youth sector and other key stakeholders insufficient recognition as relevant factors in the creation, planning and delivery of measures that relate to young people and youth organisations. Youth representatives should not just be involved in preparation — their proposals should also be taken into consideration.*

Youth coordinators have been introduced into specific ministries, at the proposal of youth organisations, in an attempt to overcome the problems of cooperation with departments and strengthen the youth dimension in specific sectoral policies.

On several occasions in the past, the idea was formed of bringing the Office for Youth directly under the prime minister's office in order to overcome the obstacles to inter-departmental coordination. The majority of our interviewees are of one mind, however: that the Office for Youth needs, first and foremost, to be strengthened in terms of personnel, funding and powers. Another former director of the Office pointed out that her role was very undefined (Dolores Koles, interview, 18 May 2021):

*In terms of its competencies, the Office has only a coordinating role in the field of horizontal youth policies. I would give the Office greater weight in horizontal policies. This does not mean taking powers away from other ministries, but I do think that the Office should simply do more. It has no capacities, it has nothing, but I still believe that it should be the main driver*

*for promoting youth-related topics. As a coordinator, you don't have the power to change things. The role of the Office is currently also to support the umbrella youth organisations to ensure that they are active in the field, because then ideas or pressures, whatever you want to call them, arrive at specific ministries from different angles.*

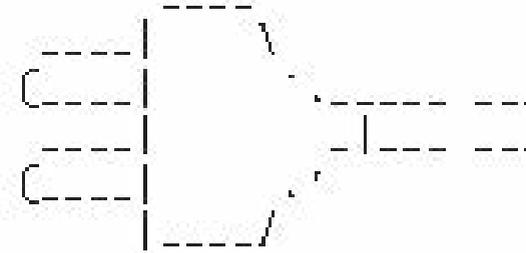
## Inclusion of young people

A central plank of good youth policy is undoubtedly the participation of young people in its entire public policy cycle — that is, from formulation and monitoring, to delivery and evaluation. At the normative level, Slovenia is aware of this; and while the mechanisms are in place, the delivery phase could be more consistent and successful. The Government Council for Youth was established with the aim of including young people in the process of creating youth policy. It performs two functions: first, it fosters the formalised participation of young people in the creation of youth policy and, as such, constitutes the highest level of youth dialogue in the country; second, it promotes the cross-sectoral character of youth policy by comprising representatives of different youth organisations on the one side and representatives of various ministries (government representatives) on the other. This is an ideal picture only on paper; in practice, it is ineffective, with the Council displaying a distinct lack of interest in discussion and decision-making. In an interview conducted on 15 April 2021, Tadej Beočanin, a former member of the Council, had this to say about it:

*[I]t has managed to fulfil its mission only to a certain extent. Because as soon as there are indecisive, bureaucratic people at the table, particularly on the government side, it starts to lose its validity as a decision-making body.*

This is a problem that young people themselves were quick to recognise, leading the National Youth Council to propose that the presence of more senior-level political representation be secured within the Government Council for Youth. With the support of the Office for Youth and the line ministry, ministers began to be appointed to the Government Council. However, this has not proved effective because the lack of interest means that they simply do not attend meetings and do not send deputies. This is a further example of the importance of political will to youth policy. In this context, the past support for the Government Council at prime ministerial level proved very positive, and attracted media attention, with various prime ministers attending some Council meetings.

According to the principles of good youth policy, one of the most important roles in the development of youth policy should also be played by the umbrella youth organisation. In Slovenia's case, we can say that the importance of the National Youth Council is recognised by politicians, who are prepared to involve it in policymaking and delivery processes. As its policy officer Tanja Baumkirher says: 'It has had the most significant role of all youth organisations in the field of youth policy. For students it's the student organisation [Študentska organizacija Slovenije, Slovenian Student Union], but for other policies and the development of the youth sector, it is the National Youth Council that has played the central role' (Tanja Baumkirher, interview, 15 April 2021). While she also admits that the proposals drawn up by the Council generally



remain unimplemented, she does point out that ‘certain things do happen if enough work is done on them’ (ibid.).

## Relationship between national and local levels

Any overview of the development of youth policy in Slovenia cannot but help point out the major issues that attend the relationship between national and local levels — or more specifically, the powers of local communities versus those of central government. As the material produced during the adoption of the public interest act states (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act [Draft], 2010):

*With due regard to the guidelines of the resolutions, which highlight the responsibilities and powers of local actors in relation to young people and youth work, the powers of central government and local communities are separated in the text of the draft law. Local communities should themselves establish the specific features of their youth population and produce measures on that basis.*

This demarcation is entirely clear in the law itself, which provides that municipalities are responsible for the youth field at local level. However, the provision on the obligations that municipalities have in this area is slightly less clear, as the youth field is not one of the tasks of municipalities set out in the Local Self-Government Act. There is therefore a general belief that the development of youth policy at local level is, to a large degree, dependent on the interest of the mayor. This is confirmed by Tine Radinja, mayor of Škofja Loka, who says that while making the youth field one of the tasks of municipalities is a positive move, the necessary mechanisms do have to be set up, including financial mechanisms, as municipalities often finance the entirety of youth policy measures from their own funds (interview, 9 April 2021); only then can municipalities begin to think about young people and youth policy as being among their compulsory tasks. Of course, while views on this differ, it is undeniable that ‘it is financial resources, if provided by central government, that would encourage municipalities to begin to address this area in a more comprehensive way, or begin to invest more funds and do so more quickly’ (Tadej Beočanin, interview, 15 April 2021).

Key players at national level are also aware of the need to strengthen cooperation between national and local levels. The National Youth Council points out that youth policy can only be effective if it is carried out in close cooperation between national and local authorities, and that the two levels must determine a systemic arrangement of the powers and obligations of municipalities in the management and financing of youth work and policies (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2020). The awareness of the need for closer cooperation between national and local authorities also prompted the creation of the ‘Rastimo skupaj’ (Growing Together) project. This is carried out by the Office for Youth and National Youth Council together, and aims to integrate and strengthen municipalities’ capacities to develop youth policy successfully. The Europe Goes Local project, which is designed to develop youth work at local level and is led by the MOVIT Institute for the Development of Youth Mobility, is also part of these efforts, as is the Youth-Friendly Municipality Certificate, which is administered by the Institute for Youth Policy (Inštitut za mladinsko politiko).

## Looking towards the future

- If we are to have a targeted and effective (national) youth strategy, elements of the national programme must be formulated in collaboration with line ministries. Only mirrored starting points that are either repeated in departmental strategies or transferred to the national programme can realise the delivery potential that individual line ministries have at their disposal.
- To monitor the performance and effectiveness of youth policy measures, particularly for the National Youth Programme, we require a special mechanism, supported by adequate data that enables the effective measuring of indicators and progress, and by a robust research and analytical infrastructure.
- An instrument for assessing the impacts on young people should be introduced, with young people themselves being involved in the assessment process (‘youth mainstreaming’). This would prevent the adoption of sectoral policies that have a negative effect on the position and status of young people.
- To bolster the development of youth policy at local level, consideration should be given to amending the Local Self-Government Act so that the youth field is made one of the compulsory tasks of municipalities (which should also be given sufficient funding for this purpose)
- Cooperation between national and local decision-makers and policymakers must be strengthened if the National Youth Programme and its measures are to be delivered with greater success.
- Consideration should be given to drafting special programming and financial mechanisms to encourage municipalities to develop youth policies that bolster local youth policy development.
- As participation is a key feature of good youth policy, steps must be taken to ensure that young people are able to take part in the creation and delivery of public policy, for example by participating and helping to make decisions in bodies set up to draft regulations, and in structures that indirectly or directly oversee their delivery.
- To improve inter-sectoral cooperation, youth coordinators should be appointed to ministries with a clear set of tasks and responsibilities, and organisational, human resource and management support secured so as to enable them to carry out those tasks smoothly.
- It would also make sense to organise regular training in the fields of youth, youth policy and youth work for public officials at all levels who deal with the youth field in the course of their work.

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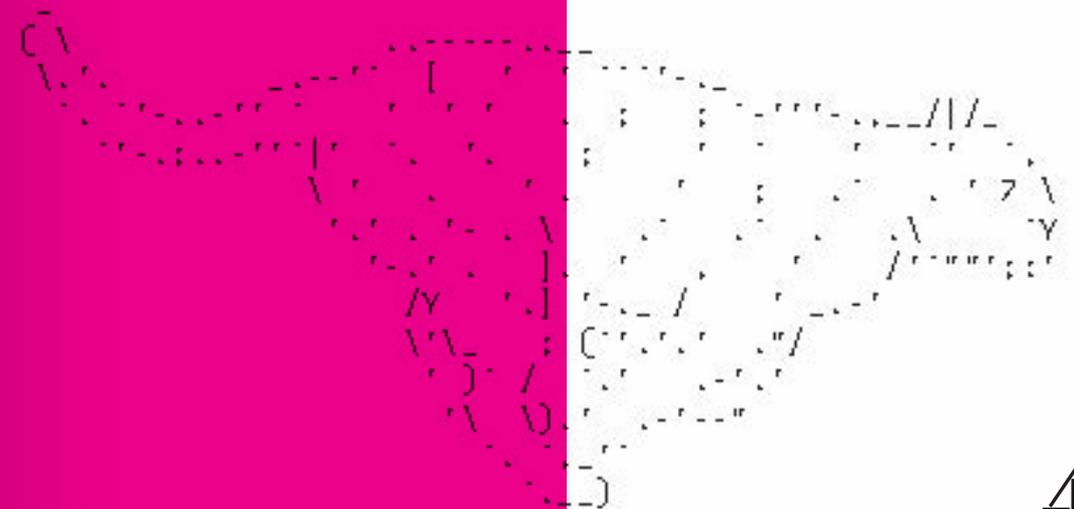
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## Chapter 2

# Paper Tiger

The Development  
and Position of the  
Slovenian Office  
for Youth

**Andraž Zgonc**  
**Tin Kampl**  
**Tomaž Deželan**



# Key milestones in the development of the Office for Youth

**1991:** Office for Youth founded

**1994:** Student Association Act

**2000:** Youth Councils Act

**2009:** Government Council for Youth founded

**2010:** Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act

**2013:** Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022

## National authority in the field of youth policy

A clearly defined and established public authority is one of the key requirements of good youth policy. The explicitly cross-sectoral character of that policy also makes it imperative that we know precisely which entity is responsible for the youth field within the structure of the state and for acting as coordinator between different departments, the aim being to ensure that the goals of youth policy are realised in a balanced and concerted manner. In Slovenia this role has been assigned to the Office for Youth (Urad RS za mladino, URSM), which is the central institutionalised entity for youth policy in Slovenia.

The institutional development of youth policy in Slovenia has passed through several phases over the last three decades, with each phase building on the one before. That development can be regarded as having started in 1991 with the establishment of the Office for Youth as the state body responsible for youth policy. However, for most of its existence the Office had no adequate grounding in law that would have enabled it to make a more decisive contribution to the development of an institutionalised youth policy — a situation that was not rectified until nearly 20 years later with the adoption of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju, 2010). This law, which has been instrumental in enabling youth policy to develop to its current dimensions, was the first time the youth field in Slovenia had seen any type of comprehensive legal regulation.

As the central youth policy institution in Slovenia, the Office for Youth is important not only because it performs key tasks and functions, but also because it exerts an impact on the social and political environment of the country. That impact is a continuous one, since the Office is part of an environment that includes representatives of young people as a social group as well as civil society youth organisations. In addition to surveying the interests of young people and parlaying them into public policies in other areas, the Office ensures that youth policy occupies a stable position within the established legislative framework (which is also to some extent conditional upon whether the Office itself is stable and suitably positioned in terms of content, expertise, organisation and finances). This chapter examines in detail the position of the Office for Youth as the central youth policy institution tasked with realising the public interest in the youth sector at national level. Some of its tasks also provide an insight into how the public interest in that sector is realised in practice.

## Formulation of the role and tasks of the Office for Youth

The Office for Youth is the central government authority responsible for the youth field — or, more specifically, for ensuring that the public interest in the youth sector is realised at national level. Since its establishment in 1991 ‘as a consequence of the debate on the youth councils act’, which failed to be adopted at that time (Janez Škulj, interview, 16 April 2021),<sup>1</sup> it has operated as an authority affiliated to the ministry responsible for education. This was the role envisaged for it in the Organisation and Area of Work of the Republic Administration Act passed in June 1991 by the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, which instructed the Office to ‘carry out tasks relating to the organisation of youth camps and voluntary work, contacts with non-party-affiliated youth organisations at home and abroad (youth councils, associations of school pupils and students, etc.), travel allowances for children and young people, and other

<sup>1</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

youth-related activities' (Organisation and Area of Work of the Republic Administration Act, 1991, Article 22).

An authority responsible for the youth field was therefore first established within a state administration setting in 1991. Its tasks were focused largely on the management of or participation in established state measures and activities in the youth field — that is to say, it was less interested in the issue of development. However, the establishment of the Office for Youth should be understood primarily in terms of the perceived importance, at that time, of inserting youth-related issues into the work of central government, and of setting up a competent authority that could be developed over the years and gain additional recognition and responsibilities. Indeed, its tasks did change in this direction over time, most notably in response to the provisions of the Decree on Administrative Authorities Within Ministries, which were adopted around ten years after the Office was founded. These provisions instructed the Office to perform tasks 'relating to the planning and delivery of measures in the field of youth policy, to the implementation of social policies for children and young people, and to schooling and non-formal education, leisure activities, culture, public information and international cooperation in these areas' (Decree on Administrative Authorities Within Ministries, 2003, Article 15).

Since 2015, that Decree has tasked the Office with performing expert, administrative, organisational and developmental work in the youth sector; monitoring the position of young people and the impact of measures in the youth sector; overseeing the implementation of regulations and measures in the youth sector; participating in youth-related matters at international level; and performing other work laid down by the law governing the youth sector (Decree on Administrative Authorities Within Ministries, 2015, Article 8). The best synthesis of the functions of the Office as a state-level administrative body responsible for taking an integrated approach to the regulation of youth policy and the youth sector in Slovenia is probably to be found in the sectoral Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (2010), Article 7 of which defines the tasks of the Office as being to draft regulations and measures in the youth sector, provide financial support to youth programmes and programmes for young people, ensure that youth sector regulations and measures are implemented (and oversee that implementation), monitor the position of young people and the impact of measures in the youth sector, work with competent authorities and other youth sector entities, represent the country in European Union and Council of Europe bodies and on youth-related matters at international level, and perform other tasks mandated by law.

As this overview shows, there have also been changes over time to the way the Office for Youth's work addresses the narrower and wider contexts of youth policy. The initial tight focus on individual measures and activities designed for young people, which tended to exclude a broader consideration of what youth policy might entail, gradually gave way to an approach that sought to include other areas and fields. Today, the Office's tasks relate chiefly to the youth sector, although we should again regard this in both its broader and narrower senses if we wish to come to a fuller understanding of the Office's role and position. Indeed, the name of the Office for Youth and its designated tasks often led to its role being somewhat misunderstood. From its founding, it mainly operated within the domain of vertical youth policy (its direct sphere of competence) and only to a lesser extent within that of horizontal youth policy.

However, the understanding of and work in this area began to change at the Office as Slovenia entered and passed through the EU accession process, driven by a

change in the level of commitment required and the drafting of the measures that ultimately brought these changes about. They included the establishment of the Slovenian Government Council for Youth (Svet Vlade RS za mladino, SVM), the drafting and adoption of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, and the preparation of the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu za mladino 2013–2022, ReNPM13–22, 2013). These milestones today constitute the main building blocks for the institutional regulation of youth policy and the youth sector in Slovenia, and have, in turn, transformed the Office's tasks in terms of the relationship between vertical and horizontal youth policy. The public interest act sees the youth sector as the primary domain of the Office, and sets out the process by which youth policy in the broader sense is to be formulated and delivered (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, 2010, Article 3), chiefly from the point of view of the Office's responsibility for coordinating the preparation, delivery and evaluation of the national programme.

Among other things, the Office for Youth promotes processes of non-formal learning with the aim of better equipping young people with the skills they need to pass from childhood to adulthood, and is also responsible for the establishment and growth of mechanisms of support for youth organisations and organisations for young people — mechanisms that are seen as vitally important to active youth participation. Similarly, in cooperation with other central government bodies and local communities, it monitors the position of young people and the impact of measures designed for them with the aim of incorporating young people's needs and interests into the formulation of other public policies, and carries out expert, organisational and administrative tasks for the Government Council for Youth.

The Office for Youth is therefore responsible for developing youth policy and youth work in Slovenia. Since youth policy and youth work take place in an arena that enables young people to develop their potential, it employs a variety of measures to promote and develop youth organisation and the participation of young people in societal processes; it also actively participates in the competent bodies of the EU, the Council of Europe and other international alliances concerned with the position of young people, and ensures, through international cooperation, that the goals of youth policy are realised through the strengthening of the youth sector in Slovenia. As the competent national authority, the Office oversees the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes, which are led by the national agency that operates within Zavod MOVIT, a non-governmental organisation. The importance of the Office in providing young people with information can also be seen from the establishment of the mlad.si portal in 2010, which is evidence of the ambition to set up a central online information point for young people within a national youth communications hub.

## Regulation of the status of the Office for Youth and the legislative framework for youth

As we have already seen, the Office for Youth was established and has operated throughout as a body affiliated to the ministry responsible for education. Ministry-affiliated bodies are founded for the purpose of performing specialised expert tasks, executive and development administrative tasks, inspection tasks, and other tasks and forms of oversight in areas designated as public services. In the Office's case, this means that it carries out expert tasks in the youth field and administrative tasks

arising from the publication of administrative acts, mainly decisions and resolutions, in public tender procedures and in procedures for deciding on the granting of public interest status to organisations.

Since the founding of the Office in 1991, debates have taken place on a range of dilemmas that have never been properly and comprehensively resolved; these include the issue of whether an education ministry is the right setting for the Office, with several entities and individuals within the youth work sector (particularly those active predominantly in other fields, such as employment, social affairs, health and culture, that nevertheless have a bearing on the youth sector) arguing that it changes the strategic focus of youth work and therefore the purpose of that work. Others have highlighted dilemmas connected to the Office's powers, or whether it can play a meaningful horizontal youth policy role. Their arguments focus on the fact that, because it is located within a single ministry, it is unable to foster successful inter-sectoral coordination of youth policy that goes beyond its home ministry.

These dilemmas have led to the formulation of several different ideas on how the position of a national authority responsible for youth might be regulated; these have ranged from the creation of a special ministry for youth or the establishment of an office directly at government level, with the aim of increasing political recognition of the field, to the setting-up of an independent agency to ensure a greater level of professionalism, particularly in the development of youth work. While none of these alternatives have been the subject of serious consideration, perhaps the most significant step came in 2014 during Alenka Bratušek's government, when the prime minister threw her weight behind a proposal to reorganise the Office by moving it from the position of a ministry-affiliated body to that of a government-level office, which would have led to the appointment of a state secretary for youth affairs. No progress was made on this proposal, but we should note that, had it become a government service, the Office would likely not have been able to perform one of its central tasks: that of assessing whether applicants are entitled to acquire the status of an organisation operating in the public interest.

One of the key challenges that has accompanied the Office for Youth since its inception, that of ensuring a suitable legal basis for its own work and that of the youth sector generally, has rendered certain urgent systemic changes impossible in the past. One such example is its Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy Until 2010 (Strategija Urada RS za mladino na področju mladinske politike do leta 2010), which was an attempt to create a strategic document to determine the priorities and goals of the youth sector. However, because of the lack of any legal basis, it could not acquire anything more than the status of an 'internal' Office document.

One significant piece of legislation associated with the Office is the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act of 2010. As its name suggests, it defines the public interest in the youth sector and the method by which that public interest is realised. It defines young people as all adolescents and young adults of both sexes aged between 15 and 29, and contains provisions defining the youth sector, the status of youth organisations, the procedure of providing financial support, and national awards. It also established the Office for Youth as the public authority responsible for the youth field in law, and provided the legal basis for the adoption of the National Youth Programme and the establishment of the Government Office for Youth. Other legislation relating to youth can be divided into criminal, civil and social legislation. In contrast to the public interest act, the Slovenian Criminal Code places adolescents into three groups:

younger adolescents (those aged between 14 and 16); older adolescents (those who have reached the age of 16 but are not yet 18); and young adults, who are over the age of 18 and have committed a criminal offence as an adult, but who have not yet reached the age of 21. The Code of Obligations and the Marriage and Family Relations Act (1977) are the two main pieces of civil legislation with relevance to young people. Both provide that a person acquires partial legal and business capacity at 15 and full legal and business capacity at 18 (although they may acquire full legal capacity earlier if they marry or become a parent). The Employment Relationships Act (2013) provides that a young person may sign an employment contract when they reach the age of 15, and that any contract signed before that age is null and void.

The State Administration Act lays down the conditions under which ministry-affiliated bodies are established, and provides that administrative tasks shall be performed by ministries, ministry-affiliated bodies and administrative units. Under that law, ministry-affiliated bodies are founded for the purpose of performing specialised expert tasks, executive and development administrative tasks, inspection tasks, and other tasks and forms of oversight in areas designated as public services if this ensures that tasks are thereby performed more effectively and to a higher standard, or if a greater degree of professional independence in the performance of tasks needs to be secured because of the nature of the tasks or the area of work involved. While the establishment of the Office for Youth led to a special role being granted to the youth sector, youth organisations and youth work generally, we cannot argue that it assigned a special role to young people as a target group; this is chiefly because the task of realising the interests and objectives of the youth field has remained within the domain of the respective line ministries.

## **Co-management of youth policy and the role of the Government Council for Youth**

Although youth participation is not explicitly determined as one of its central functions, the Office for Youth has been a key factor in promoting and strengthening it over the years. This is a two-way process, as the Office has also evolved in response to the impact that the environment has had on it. The participation of youth sector organisations, which played an important role in the Office's establishment and subsequent development, has been at the forefront of this process. These organisations have therefore never perceived the Office as being a state body on the 'opposing' side; rather, they have generally embraced it and seen it as a partner, and even in some cases as an 'extended arm' when it comes to advocating for the interests of young people and youth sector organisations in their dealings with political decision-makers. It is precisely because of this interconnection and interaction (which has, of course, been more pronounced at some points than others) that the promotion and realisation of participation of youth sector stakeholders has been such an integral part of the Office's work over the years.

Management of the youth policy field jointly with youth and youth sector representatives was already an important part of the Office's remit in the 1990s, when moves were made to study how the youth field was co-managed at the Council of Europe. The model of that time was transferred to Slovenia with the establishment of the Joint Commission for Youth Affairs (Mešana komisija za mladinska vprašanja), which comprised representatives of the Office and the National Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije, MSS). The Joint Commission decided on certain matters

within the Office's domain, such as the co-financing of youth work programmes; in that respect, it was the predecessor of today's Government Council for Youth (although the scope of the latter's operations exceeds that of the Joint Commission, which was restricted to the competencies covered by the Office).

The Government Council for Youth was set up following a founding decision adopted by the Slovenian government in 2009, although it was not provided with a legal grounding for its work until the adoption of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (on which the Government Council supplied its opinion at the time). Following its establishment, a number of different ideas were put forward by representatives of youth sector organisations — specifically, that since the Government Council for Youth was the representative body for young people generally, in contrast to the Government Council for Student Affairs (Svet Vlade RS za študentska vprašanja), it would be worth considering making the latter a working group within the former. However, this idea did not meet with support. The law and the founding decision established the Government Council for Youth as a government advisory body comprising government representatives and representatives of youth sector organisations in equal numbers. These representatives were nominated by the organisations themselves, and appointed during proceedings conducted by the National Youth Council and the MaMa Youth Network. Ministry representatives originally came from the ministries of agriculture, the interior and education, but this gradually widened to include representatives of the areas of public administration, labour and the family, culture, the environment and spatial planning, health and cohesion policy, as well as from the prime minister's office and the Office for Youth. This enabled a broad range of areas relevant to young people to be covered.

Over the course of its existence, the Government Council for Youth has set up (as well as abolished) several working groups, including groups for traineeships, apprenticeships, the monitoring of the National Youth Programme, quality assurance in youth work, youth policies and digital transformation. It has also provided a forum for several interesting ideas — for example, the introduction of a 'youth euro' along the lines of the 'bencinski tolar',<sup>2</sup> the establishment of a youth foundation and a ministry of youth affairs — but has also encountered challenges along the way. Tea Jarc has criticised its work mainly in terms of the fact that it 'instrumentalises' the role of young people within the organisation (interview, 20 April 2021):

*This is precisely an example of this tokenism that we see. The Government Council for Youth could work to ensure that young people are included in all decision-making processes. But again, we see that they do not [...] Decisions are taken as ends in themselves and then not even implemented [...] Again, it's some kind of empty structure that seems to exist for itself rather than attempting to make a real contribution to change in the field.*

## Main topics and events addressed by the Office for Youth

With its comprehensive regulation of youth policy and the youth sector, the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act represented something of a turning point when it was adopted in 2010. For the strategic development of the field, it provided a legal

<sup>2</sup> This was a levy on the consumer price of fuel, the proceeds of which were used to construct the Slovenian motorway network in the years following independence. The tolar was Slovenia's currency prior to the euro.

basis for the adoption of a national youth programme, which has subsequently become the strongest institutional tool that Slovenian youth policy and the Office for Youth possess. It also provided a broad and relatively precise basis for the drafting and implementation of the National Youth Programme by defining the elements of the programme, the role of the entity in charge of drafting the programme (the ministry, in collaboration with youth sector organisations), the various responsibilities involved, and the method employed to monitor delivery of the programme. There was also a wide-ranging public discussion that accompanied the adoption of the National Youth Programme and took place at the Government Council for Youth, at regional presentations across Slovenia, at the National Assembly, and at the public presentation of opinions involving representatives of youth sector organisations. The public interest act provides that the government is to present an interim report on the delivery of the National Youth Programme to the National Assembly every three years, to give youth organisations the opportunity to express their opinion on how well it has been implemented. The drafting of this opinion is to be coordinated by the National Youth Council; contributions to that process have, in the past, come from a range of organisations, including the Slovenian Student Union (Študentska organizacija Slovenije), the MaMa Youth Network, Nefiks, the Slovenian Rural Youth Association (Zveza slovenske podeželske mladine) and others. The drafting of the national programme significantly reinforced the desire to raise the profile of youth work and youth organisations, and to increase the visibility of investment in young people by various stakeholders, where this visibility was lacking before.

The Social Protection Institute (Inštitut RS za socialno varstvo) was enlisted to assist in the monitoring of the National Youth Programme, which was regarded as a key task. The Office for Youth took this decision because it felt that the Institute had, through its various projects, demonstrated considerable knowledge of the youth field and a desire to expand its area of work to include it; it also expected synergies to be achieved in this field, as the Institute had already set up the Children's Observatory following the adoption of the Programme for Children and Young People (Program za otroke in mladino). This was not, however, a youth programme per se, as its upper age limit was 18 years, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office therefore saw an opportunity to create a 'youth observatory' to monitor the position of young people, a process that was not yet on a systematic footing but had been addressed in research studies or through the general monitoring of the youth field. It attempted to bring this idea to fruition in other ways as well, for example by amending the founding act of the Educational Research Institute (Pedagoški inštitut) and including these tasks in the annual work plan. However, this objective has not yet been achieved.

The youth policy audit conducted by the Slovenian Court of Audit in 2016 was another important milestone in the Office's history, and signalled the relevance of youth policy to central government's other fields of public policy. However, despite the Office's best efforts, the outcomes of the audit were not implemented fully or in accordance with the expectations of sectoral stakeholders, as there was a perception that the auditors had failed to properly understand the specific role of the Office and of youth sector organisations generally. Some elements of the audit report did not pay sufficient regard to the youth context or to the (political) context of the monitoring of the National Youth Programme, while others were simply unworkable or, from the point of view of youth policy, unacceptable (e.g. the issuing of fines to organisations

that did not take the necessary steps towards achieving the objectives). Similarly, some of the expectations, such as the financial evaluation of funds intended for the youth population, were discriminatory in comparison with the treatment given to some other policies or population groups (no such financial processes were required for the elderly, for example).

**Non-formal education** has been one of the Office for Youth's core fields of operation since the beginning. Its importance can be traced through the various initiatives and documents produced by the Office over the years, such as the public call for the co-financing of youth programmes, where youth sector organisations are steered towards preparing youth work programmes that include non-formal education as one of

their basic starting points. This area has also gained in importance in recent years, as studies of the position of young people in Slovenia (e.g. *Mladina 2010* [Youth 2010] and *Mladina 2020* [Youth 2020]) show.

The fact that non-formal education does not lead to a publicly recognised certificate is a problem that organisations have acknowledged for some time, their argument being that young people need to be provided with a proper record of the non-formal education they have undertaken. One advocate of this initiative is the Nefiks non-governmental organisation, which has been financially supported by the Office for Youth since fairly early on. Other initiatives arose subsequently in Slovenia and Europe that coincided with the adoption of the National Vocational Qualifications Act (*Zakon o nacionalnih poklicnih kvalifikacijah*), which brought formal and non-formal education together and enabled individuals to obtain a public national vocational qualification (NVQ) certificate for the profession they performed but for which they did not have the necessary publicly accredited public education. This was made possible by a vocational standard that was the same for programmes of vocational and professional education and for NVQs. For the Office, individuals performing youth work that was not properly valued or recognised were being placed at a disadvantage. The National Youth Programme therefore prioritised 'the establishment of a national education and training system for youth workers and youth leaders' (Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022, 2013) by inserting it in priority sub-area 1 in the field of education. In 2016 an initiative was drawn up in collaboration with representatives of the Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Center RS za poklicno izobraževanje) to create a vocational standard for youth workers.

The initiative proceeded from the fact that profession of youth worker did actually exist on the labour market (indeed, at that time the Office received a letter from around 30 municipalities in support of the introduction of a vocational qualification for youth workers) and that it was not possible to obtain a vocational qualification in any other way. Steps also had to be taken to resolve the dilemma of whether the introduction of an NVQ would also entail regulation of the profession, i.e. every individual who wished to pursue this profession would have to obtain the prescribed education for it. This was never the Office's intention; instead, it wished to see preparation of the vocational standard and the introduction of checks to ensure that the requirements for obtaining the qualification remained within the domain of representatives of the sector. In concrete terms, this meant that the youth sector would prepare the vocational standard as the basis for obtaining the qualification, while checks to ensure that the requirements for awarding qualifications were met would be performed by licensed and experienced youth workers. Since the introduction of this system, the number of recipients of youth worker training certificates has grown.

The NVQ for youth workers is also an important element in the set of formalised tools for developing high-quality youth work, not only within the context of identifying and recognising non-formal knowledge and building an identity for or affiliation to the youth sector, but also in terms of setting quality standards. The qualification is a result of cooperation between a broad circle of youth sector stakeholders who came together in response to the need for greater recognition for youth work and, at the same time, a higher degree of professionalisation of the sector. This very directly addressed the issue of the quality of youth work, which remains an important area of focus for the Office for Youth and the youth sector as a whole.

## Reflections and opportunities for future development

As we have seen, monitoring youth populations, youth work, the youth sector and youth sector organisations, and addressing issues relating to them, have been important elements of the Office's work. The Office should also be viewed as an entity that opens space for cooperation within the youth field and with other sectoral policies, leads structured dialogue ('a key project and one through which the Office has opened quite a few doors' according to Barbara Zupan, interview, 21 April 2021), and fosters activism on the part of youth organisations, particularly the umbrella organisations, which then allows them to place the challenges facing the young onto the public policy agenda or exert additional pressure on certain bodies and authorities (Dolores Kores, interview, 18 May 2021).

Although the Office's institutional position has not changed a great deal in its 30-year history (it remains an administrative authority within the Ministry of Education), the idea of placing it directly under the prime minister has led to lively debate. This could improve the Office's position in terms of the performance of horizontal youth policy tasks, as it would 'make it quite a bit easier for it to achieve the impact it should be achieving as the coordinator of youth policy at national level' (Tadej Beočanin, interview, 15 April 2021), something that Uroš Skrinar also points out when says that 'social changes and the specifics of young people have made [the current position of the Office] out of date' (interview, 7 May 2021). Although a similar discussion of the Office's position did not take place to the same extent before the Bratušek government, and has not done so since, reservations about the suitability of its current position remain. In the opinion of some, 'the Office for Youth is a paper tiger within the education ministry and is absolutely not structured in a way that would allow it to foster the development of youth work and youth policy' (Tea Jarc, interview, 20 April 2021).

If that claim is perhaps too harsh, many people are agreed that the Office for Youth is currently too weak to confront the challenges faced by the youth sector and by young people themselves. This leads us to the question of whether it is still capable of discharging its role to a sufficient level of quality, or whether solutions for the youth sector should be sought elsewhere or in another way. Some of our interviewees have highlighted stagnation at the Office, which finds it difficult to oversee such a wide field as youth and perform the role of generator of development in the field because of the limited financial and human resources available to it. Beočanin points out that 'the Office for Youth needs to be empowered and given extra staff who have daily contact with [key] ministries in line with its coordinating function' (interview, 15 April 2021). Financing, staffing and intellectual capacity are therefore among the Office's most pressing issues, and it is currently unable to develop youth policy with any consistency, despite its role as inter-departmental coordinator. 'We can't do much more because we simply don't have the capacity, or else we actually don't have the power to begin developing it at this stage' (Dolores Kores, interview, 18 May 2021). One of the main problems that arises here concerns other actors in the sector with considerably more human resource capacities and the power to allocate funds to organisations, which indirectly gives them the role of policymakers in the public youth field. This can lead to a lack of any kind of democratic or administrative accountability in the case of private legal entities, which generally pursue the interests of their founders and are not obliged to take the public interest into account.

Observations such as these have led many to reflect on the necessity of giving greater recognition and additional powers to the Office for Youth. Tanja Baumkirher

stresses that 'it's not so important where an institution is; I think it's more important what role it is granted, how much funding is earmarked for it, how many employees it has, i.e. how much power it has, how much is invested in it' (interview, 15 April 2021). Tine Radinja agrees, and highlights the importance of providing sufficient funding to the Office (interview, 9 April 2021), while Peter Debeljak is convinced that, in principle, institutional engineering makes no difference. 'You could be the super-ministry in charge of galactic affairs [...] but if you don't have the potentials, i.e. the human and financial resources and the political support, and if there's no momentum to help you open a window of opportunity, then it's not going to help' (interview, 10 May 2021). These resources can also be obtained by carrying out additional tasks, for example by managing public programmes, that in some other systems are performed either by public agencies or organisations with government office status (this is true of national and international programmes alike). This arrangement would help programmes to retain their identity and their sensitivity to the specifics of the youth sector.

The Office's political reality is that it is, to a degree, subject to the whims of politicians and the level of interest they have in addressing the challenges faced by young people and the youth sector — an honest assessment would be that it suits some actors within and outside the sector to have a weak Office for Youth. This, and the fact that the impacts of a high-quality youth policy tend to appear mainly over the long term, i.e. beyond the bounds of a single parliamentary term, calls for well-considered and strategic management from the Office capable of addressing the agenda of every context as it arises, at the same time retaining the core areas of strategic focus. The steps set out below are an attempt to show how this might be possible.

## Looking towards the future

To optimise the work of the Office for Youth, an evaluation should be made of its current position and powers; then, in accordance with the findings of the evaluation and with its basic mission as the national authority in the youth field, the Office's powers in both vertical and horizontal youth policy should be clearly and expertly defined.

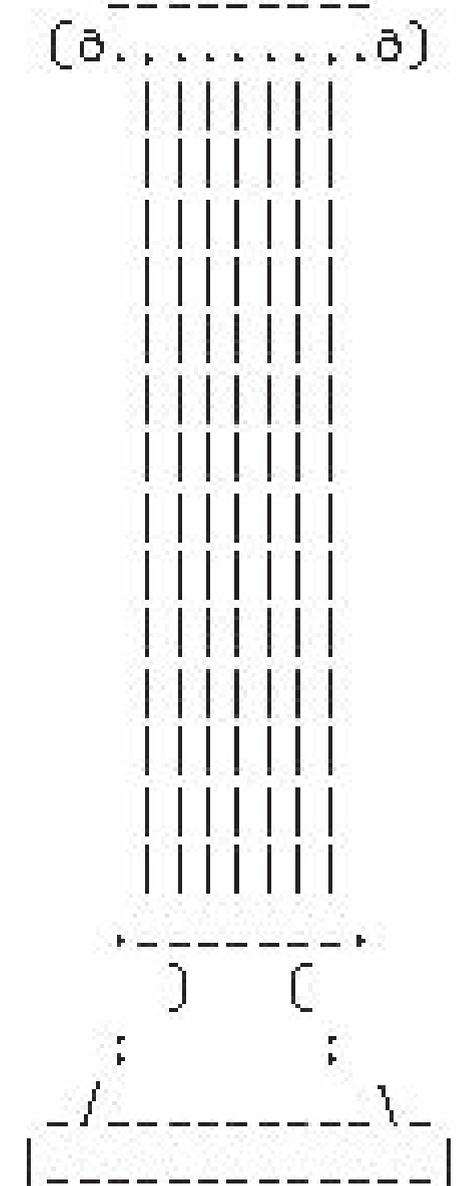
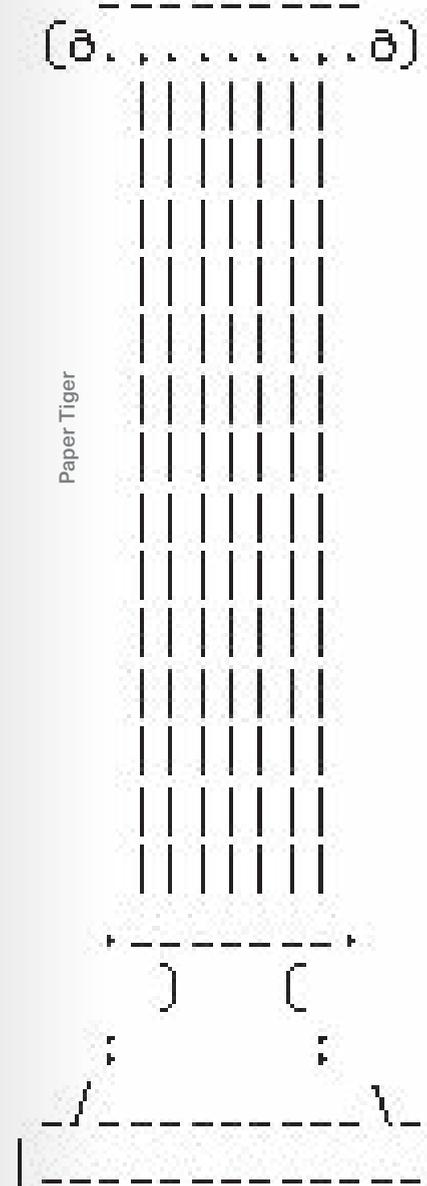
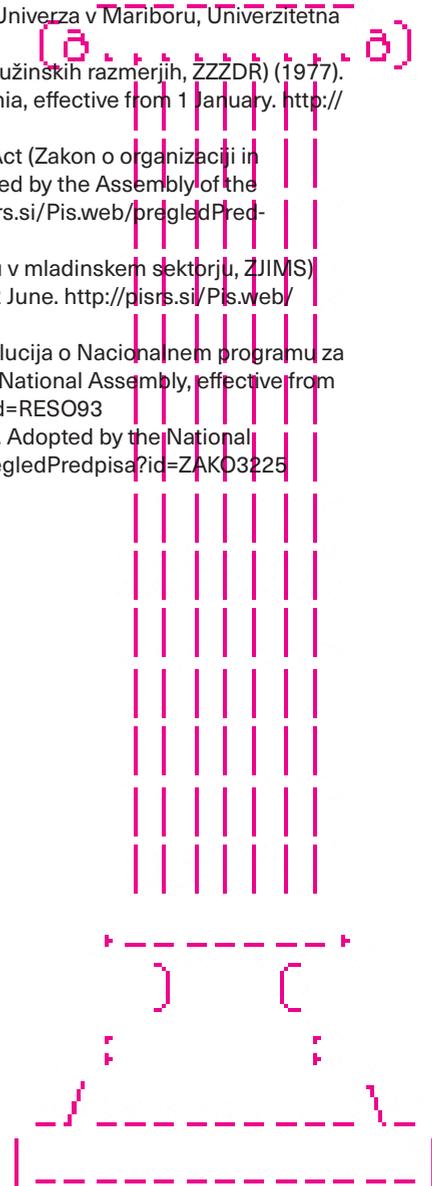
If the complexity of youth policy is to be adequately addressed, the Office for Youth's financial and human resources must be properly strengthened; this will have a beneficial impact on the planning and delivery of the national youth programme and other key tasks. This might also be done by assigning to the Office some of the tasks that are currently performed by public agencies.

To make youth policy more relevant, the Office for Youth must, in addition to the changes in its powers and responsibilities outlined above, acquire greater recognition as the central Slovenian government authority in this field. This could consolidate its role as inter-sectoral coordinator and as a link between national and local levels. This could also be achieved by increasing its capacity to carry out analyses either on its own or in partnership with research institutions.

The Office for Youth should formulate a clear operating strategy, in collaboration with the youth sector, and pursue it through successive government terms. It should provide a link between the national public policy agenda and European and local agendas in a proactive and structured way. This will reduce its tendency to 'react' to ideas introduced into the youth field — a tendency that, despite the best intentions, only adds to the entropy.

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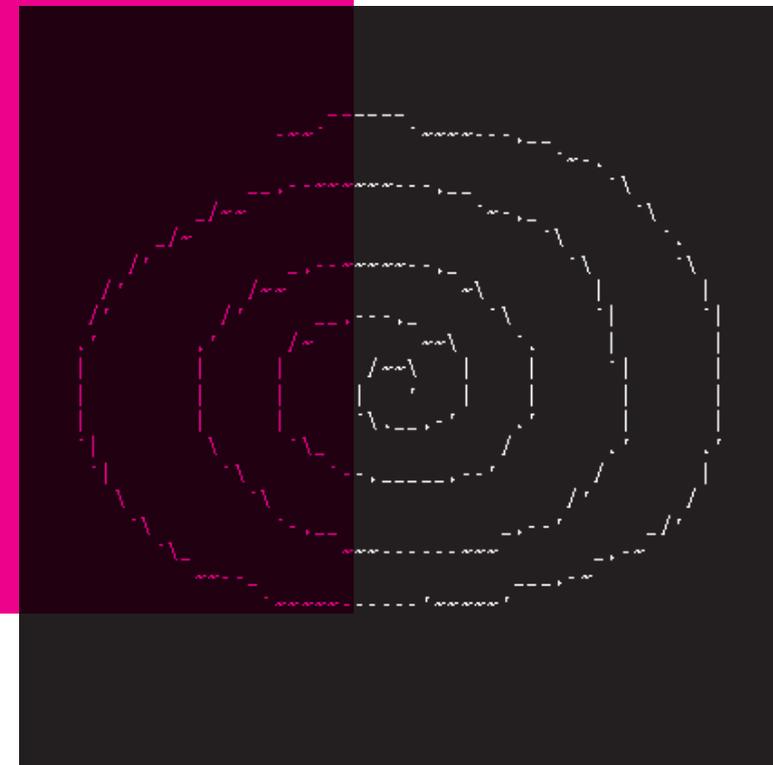


## Chapter 3

# A Bit of a Mix

## The Youth Sector in Slovenia

**Tin Kampl**  
**Tomaž Deželan**



# Key milestones in the development of the Youth sector in Slovenia

**1990:** National Youth Council of Slovenia founded

**1991:** Office for Youth founded

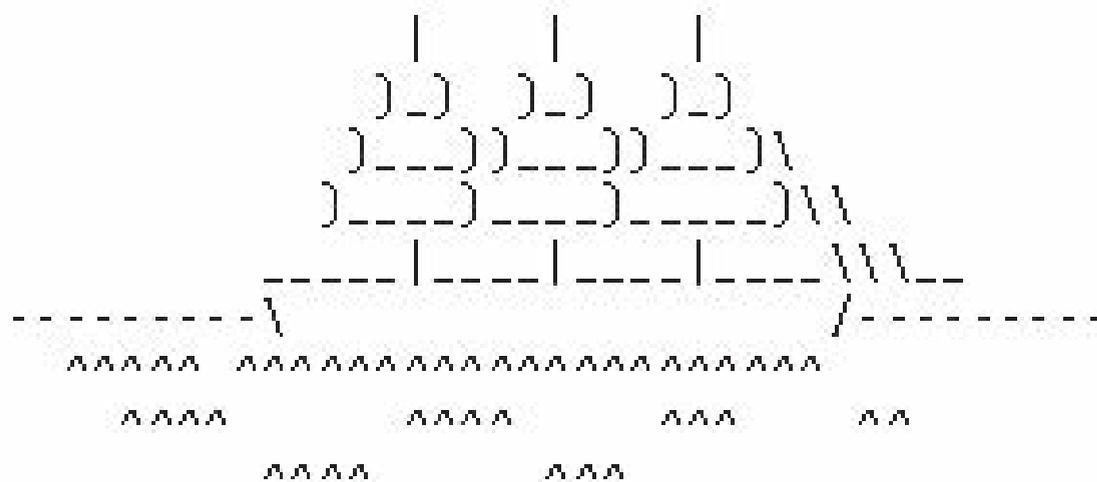
**1997:** Zavod MOVIT founded

**2000:** Youth Councils Act

**2005:** MaMa Youth Network founded

**2010:** Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act

**2013:** Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022



## What is the youth sector?

The Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju, Article 3) defines the youth sector as the field in which the process of formulating and implementing youth policies and youth work takes place. It then details, in the article following, the areas with which the youth sector is specifically concerned: the autonomy of young people, non-formal education and training, measures to increase young people's skills, access to the labour market and the development of enterprise, provisions for young people with fewer opportunities in society, voluntary work, solidarity and intergenerational cooperation, mobility and international integration, healthy lifestyles and the prevention of various types of dependency among the young, access to cultural assets, the promotion of creativity and innovation, and the participation of young people in the governance of public affairs in society (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 4). This law, adopted in 2010, gave the youth sector in Slovenia legal status and recognised it as an area of public interest. This did two things: conferred general social visibility and validity, and provided a basis for support from public authorities.

The definition adopted in Slovenia is therefore somewhat wide, and follows the internationally established understanding of the youth sector: that it 'refers to the areas in which youth activities are performed, usually specified in the general goals of the national youth strategy or other strategic document in the youth field'.<sup>1</sup> In Slovenia's case, these areas are defined within the legislative framework itself, although they are, of course, complemented and set forth in more detail in the National Youth Programme (Nacionalni program za mladino, NPM). As the definition of the youth sector in the *Glossary on Youth* goes on to state: 'Youth sector activity is organised by young people or youth policy actors, undertaken with the aim of improving the position of young people and their empowerment for active participation for their own and for the benefit of the society. The youth sector is comprised of a diverse range of government institutions, non-government organisations, agencies, private practitioners, volunteers, programmes, services and other actors that work with young people or have been established to benefit young people.'

While the term 'youth sector' was in use internationally before it became established in Slovenia, it was known and used in practice here. Prior to its definition in law, it was deployed in a similar way to the term 'non-governmental sector', and referred mainly to organisations active in the youth field. Most of these organisations were linked, in terms of the substance of their work and via calls for tenders and applications, to the operation of the Slovenian Office for Youth (Urad Republike Slovenije za mladino, URSM; see Baumkirher et al., 2012). The youth sector as we know it today was established and finally regulated with the adoption of the public interest act in 2010. This law clearly defined the terms, entities and responsibilities that had been, up to that point, more or less the product of established practice.

## Normative and substantive framework of the youth sector

The Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act adopted a comprehensive definition of youth policy that encompassed both its horizontal and vertical aspects. That said,

<sup>1</sup> Definition taken from the *Glossary on Youth published by the Youth Partnership* (Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth) (n.d.).

it does address vertical youth policy (policy relating to the regulation of the youth sector itself) more directly than it does horizontal youth policy. It defines the public interest of the state within the context of the provision of normative and other conditions for the development of fields of youth work, the inclusion of the youth aspect in strategies, policies and measures that have an impact on young people, and financial support for youth programmes and programmes for young people, including support for youth infrastructure (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 5).<sup>2</sup> The role of the state in vertical youth policy is therefore more directly expressed, since the state is tasked with developing the youth sector and youth work by putting normative and other conditions in place, particularly financial support and support for youth infrastructure. In view of this, the state's primary responsibility lies in securing sustainable support for youth work.

The state also plays an important role in determining the actual boundaries of the youth sector through the Office for Youth. In addition to the provision of financial support to youth programmes and programmes for young people, the activities directly deriving from the public interest act and imposed on the state also include the granting of the status of organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector and the awarding of prizes for achievements in the youth sector. The status of organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector can be acquired by those organisations that deliver youth programmes or programmes for young people on a regular basis, demonstrate significant achievements in the development and integration of youth work, and have the appropriate material and human resources for operation (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 11), where the law differentiates between youth organisations that meet the condition of having a predominant share of its membership and leadership made up of people aged 29 and under, and organisations for young people. The public interest act tasks the state with adopting the National Youth Programme as the central mechanism for realising the public interest in the youth sector, with the role of that programme being to define the priority tasks and measures in detail. The National Youth Programme 2013–2022 regulates the youth sector in detail in Area 5 ('Young people, society and the importance of the youth sector'), which also sets out the objectives by sub-area for the realisation of the public interest in the youth sector. This area/section of the programme refers to vertical youth policy and is not isolated from other areas, since, despite this, organisations in the youth sector carry out programmes in a number of different areas that have an impact on the lives of young people and are spread 'horizontally'.

The state ensures that the objectives of the youth sector are realised through the various mechanisms and activities of the Office for Youth: (1) The Office secures financial support by funding youth programmes and programmes for young people via public calls and invitations, and by obtaining resources from European structural funds. Of particular importance are the funding of the programme and operations of the National Youth Council (Mladinski svet Slovenije, MSS) and support for the operations of the national agency (Zavod MOVIT) for the EU's Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps youth programmes, through which a large portion of the funding for youth-related projects is provided. (2) The Office operates the mlad.si portal,

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<sup>2</sup> The article regulating the public interest in the youth sector therefore addresses the horizontal aspect only with reference to the inclusion of the youth aspect in the strategies, policies and measures of other government departments. The horizontal aspect is addressed indirectly to a greater extent mainly in the National Youth Programme (for more, see the chapter on youth policy).

which is the central information point for all young people and those who work with young people in Slovenia. (3) The main achievement in the creation of capacities for high-quality youth work in recent years has been the adoption of the national vocational qualification for youth workers. In 2018 the Office began drawing up a framework for this by establishing a special working group, holding consultations on the topic of high-quality youth work and commencing the preparation of specialist background documents; there are also regular annual youth sector consultations organised by the Office in collaboration with the National Youth Council, and other topic-specific consultations organised in collaboration with other youth sector organisations, such as Zavod MOVIT.

The Office for Youth regularly monitors the development of youth sector infrastructure and promotes it via a range of mechanisms. The most important measure in this area was the 2008 public call for applications issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (via the Office) to select operations for the co-financing of investments in youth tourist infrastructure/youth centres, which supported investment projects in public youth infrastructure. Funds from the call were used to co-finance the construction and extension of accommodation capacities at ten youth centres. The Office carries out, participates in or supports various programmes and projects for ensuring the geographically balanced development of the youth sector and the development of youth policies at local level. The 'Rastimo skupaj' (Growing Together) project, which it operates in collaboration with the National Youth Council, is another important contribution to efforts to promote the development of local youth policy. The Office also helps to strengthen the operations and network of youth councils and centres through the activities it carries out itself and in cooperation with youth sector organisations.

The Office for Youth treats the promotion of youth participation and efforts to strengthen permanent youth consultation mechanisms as priorities within the financial mechanisms available to it, with a view to encouraging organisations to address adopt a systematic approach to this area. It also supports and actively participates in the implementation of Youth Dialogue in Slovenia, mechanism between young people and decision makers, and provides support to the National Youth Council, as the main entity responsible for the process in Slovenia, in addressing proposals put forward by young people to political decision-makers in the course of consultations. Mobility in the youth sector is another important field of operation; in addition to facilitating the delivery of EU youth-related programmes in Slovenia via the national agency, the Office actively encourages youth organisations to apply for and carry out projects within both programmes. It also promotes mobility via the European Youth Card, made possible by the signing of the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility Through the Youth Card at the Council of Europe. Operation of the card is managed by a non-governmental partner, the SLOAM Youth Agency.

## **Youth sector as a space for supporting young people and learning about democracy**

Being primarily aimed at young people, a special social group situated in the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, the youth sector occupies a particular place in society. As they move along this path, young people encounter numerous transitions and other events that give rise to changes and challenges in their lives. This is a turbulent period in which every young person undergoes processes of socialisation

and acquires the new knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for successful integration into society. The youth sector is also the space in which youth work is developed. The youth sector and youth work are mutually intertwined and complementary, which makes it difficult to imagine one without the other.

To illustrate the position and importance of the youth sector for the individual and for society as a whole, we can apply the concept of the 'welfare triangle', which classifies the youth sector as a sphere of civil society and places it within a social space located between the spheres of the state, the community and private life (Evers and Laville, 2004; Pestoff, 1992). The sphere of civil society is characterised by the fact that, in some way, it contains the characteristics of all three spheres between which it stands, and can be defined using the dimensions of non-profit (the organisation does not divide the profit between its founders but returns it to the activity), private life (separation from the state) and formality (separation from the informal community).

It is in this position between the different spheres that the youth sector occupies that we can also find links with young people or their position within everyday life (which also extends within all three spheres of society) and with the challenges that originate from them and that can be successfully addressed precisely within the youth sector or the context of youth work. Within the welfare state, the youth sector is responsible for various tasks that give added value to formal education, make it easier for young people to be integrated into society, help to strengthen active citizenship among young people, and provide support to young people in their efforts to enter employment. The youth sector therefore constitutes an intermediate space of sorts in which the young person finds support and a space in which to bring their ideas into practice and become involved in society. The non-formal and informal education and learning that take place within youth sector organisations and help young people to find independence should not be overlooked. By becoming involved in non-formal education within youth organisations, young people can acquire five of the six skills most highly sought-after by employers (communication skills, decision-making skills, team-working skills, self-confidence and organisational skills, Souto-Otero et al., 2012), which complement formal education in important ways and help young people integrate into the jobs market more successfully.

In addition to understanding the youth sector and youth work as providing an appropriate environment in which young people can develop (and lessening the challenges that young people face as a result of being caught between the three spheres of society), we should also see it as a field in which democracy is learned. Youth sector organisations proceed from foundations that help create an environment in which young people are able to turn themselves into active and responsible citizens. In the youth sector, youth participation is not understood merely as a goal that needs to be achieved, but at the same time and above all as a method for meeting a wider range of objectives linked to the achievement of autonomy. Raising responsible citizens and encouraging young people to develop autonomy through the acquisition of the skills that enable them to live independently is the primary responsibility of the state, while youth sector organisations can enable young people to have an impact on society and help them along the path of economic and social independence. This, in turn, helps society to develop (see the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022, 2013; National Youth Council, 2010). Youth organisations also provide young people with direct experience of democratic life within society by involving them in formal structures (i.e. institutional youth policy).

Within the wider democratic environment, the youth sector creates an important set of civic spaces, physical, virtual and legal, where people exercise their rights to free association, expression and peaceful assembly in order to solve problems and improve lives (Deželan et al., 2020). As a collection of youth organisations and organisations for young people, the youth sector is particularly important in this context, as it comprises organisations through which young people become involved in public life. Youth sector organisations are of special importance in and for the lives of young people because they are directed towards youth-focused topics. These organisations also place these topics on the public policy agenda and seek out innovative public policy solutions for them (ibid.). By employing a set of instruments that enable young people to become involved in the public policy arena, youth sector organisations make a vital contribution to overcoming the hurdles to youth representation in democratic life. The 'legislative deficit' (i.e. the problem of the absence of youth representation in law) is an important factor here, as the right to vote, which is limited to those aged 18 and over and does not cover the entire youth population, meaning that a portion of that population is ipso facto excluded from the processes of democratic representation (Rakar et al., 2011). While some of the advocacy is assumed by parents, it is not possible to bring the specific aspirations and needs of this generation into the public policy arena by that route. Organisations in the youth sector play a key role in ensuring that these obstacles are overcome (ibid.). However, if this role is to be played successfully and the widest possible circle of young people included (those who are involved in youth organisations as well as those who are not), youth sector organisations need broader recognition and support from the community. The youth sector also makes an important contribution to promoting democratic participation among young people who are already entitled to vote and able to express their interests via the conventional channels of representative democracy. However, it does not seem to view this path as one that meets the interests of young people. Youth sector organisations have a key part to play here as well, as they are an instrument that provides an alternative to existing forms of youth representation, and one that overcomes the challenges of involving young people who are not attached in any formal way to the youth sector. Through its working methods and its established activities,<sup>3</sup> the youth sector promotes various aspects of social activity (formal voluntary work, informal networks within the community, informal political action, altruism, various forms of community engagement, etc.), thereby cultivating youth participation as a process of integration into society via the internalisation of democratic norms (ibid.).

### **Diversity of youth sector entities**

The youth sector is characterised by a highly diverse set of entities that can be distinguished from each other according to different criteria. Some of the key players in the Slovenian youth sector as identified by the normative framework as well as established practice are highlighted below. We have focused on the youth sector in the 'narrower' sense – that is, that part of the sector in which processes of direct work with young people take place within youth organisations and organisations for young people. Slovenian youth sector entities should first be divided according to the level at which they operate (national, local) and then according to whether they operate as representatives of public authority (government institutions, municipal

<sup>3</sup> For more on this, see the chapter on youth work.

bodies) or civil society (youth councils, youth organisations, organisations for young people, youth centres).

As a space in which youth policy is formulated and put into practice at national level, the youth sector is strongly influenced by the state and its institutions, with the most prominent role being played by those government institutions (ministries and government authorities) responsible for creating and delivering youth policy. The Office for Youth should obviously be highlighted here as the body within the executive branch of authority responsible for the youth field, and the main coordinator of all activities that address the position of young people in Slovenia (Office for Youth, n.d.). At local level, the role of representative of government power is assumed by municipalities; in some cases and depending on their size, they have dedicated offices that deal with youth-related matters. Zavod MOVIT, which performs the role of national agency for EU youth programmes (and also finances various other activities) is another important factor, and there is a wide variety of civil society organisations active in the youth sector, each with their own role and level of importance in relation to the development of youth policies and youth work. They can be divided into four main groups: youth organisations (including national ones), youth councils, youth centres and other non-governmental organisations. This division is based on the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act and on the main Office for Youth financial mechanism used to co-fund youth work programmes (i.e. public calls for applications). The public interest act divides organisations into three types: youth organisations, organisations for young people and youth councils. It also defines the activities of youth centres, which have, from the beginning, been a constant participant in the Office's calls for applications and are divided in turn into three main groups of eligible organisations: national youth organisations, youth centres and other youth-related NGOs. Until 2015, local youth councils were also part of this group, but were subsequently excluded from public calls on account of their specific characteristics. They are now addressed by other financing instruments.

## Youth organisations

Young people within the youth sector come together and are active within a range of different forms of organisation. Roughly speaking, these organisations can be divided into youth organisations and organisations for young people. The latter carry out programmes for young people and have workers qualified to do that work, but they are not regarded as 'youth organisations'; this does not mean, however, that young people are not involved in devising and delivering programmes in these organisations. According to Article 3 of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, a youth organisation is:

*... an autonomous, democratic, voluntary and independent association of young people whose operations enable young people to acquire the planned learning experiences, formulate and express their views, and carry out activities in accordance with their interests, cultural interests, opinions or political convictions, and that is organised as an independent legal entity, specifically as a society, association of societies or an integral part of another legal entity, specifically a society, association of societies, trade union or political party, where the founding instrument of this legal entity guarantees autonomy of operation in the youth sector.*

A youth organisation is managed with the active involvement of all members, who are given an equal opportunity to take part in that management (National Youth

Council, 2010). Young people comprise the bulk of the membership and leadership of youth organisations, of course: according to the public interest act, at least 90% of the membership must be aged up to 29 and 70% of the leading positions must be occupied by people aged between 15 and 29 (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 11). According to the definition set out in the law, as well as definitions given elsewhere, the four basic characteristics that youth organisations are required to have relate to: voluntary membership, age of membership and of those in leading positions (the large majority must be young people), democracy of operation, and operation to the benefit of young people. In terms of level of operation, youth organisations can be divided into national and local. To obtain national youth organisation status, the organisation must have at least 300 members, and operate or have units in most statistical regions in Slovenia, although these conditions do not need to be met by organisations made up of members of the Italian or Hungarian national communities or the Roma community (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 12).

Baumkircher et al. (2012) point out that national youth organisations in the youth sector have a special role because of the size of their membership, their bridging role and, above all, their involvement in democratic processes at national level (which introduces their members to active and responsible citizenship). From the way their status is regulated in the public interest act and the fact that they are treated separately in the public calls for the co-funding of youth work programmes organised by the Office for Youth, it is clear that national youth organisations are recognised as being among the most important elements of the youth sector in Slovenia. This is partly due to the way Slovenian youth organisations have developed through history and the impact they have had on the youth sector. They are the youth sector entities with the longest tradition, and are responsible for numerous achievements that have had a significant effect not just on the development of the youth sector and youth policy, but also on society as a whole. With respect to their legal status, youth organisations in Slovenia are organised as independent youth organisations in the form of societies or associations of societies, although they can also be organised as youth organisations within existing member organisations, which themselves can take the form of a society, association of societies, political party or trade union. For a youth wing of a trade union to be recognised as a youth organisation, the parent organisation's founding instrument must guarantee it autonomy of operation within the youth sector (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 11).

The Political Parties Act also makes reference to youth wings and youth organisations in political parties, and specifically the membership options for minors: a minor who is at least 15 years old may join a political party's youth organisation, but requires the consent of their parents if they wish to join the political party itself (Political Parties Act, 1994, Article 6). That law also refers to youth organisations in the section dealing with the funding of political parties – specifically, that a youth organisation with the status of an organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector may receive public funds for the co-financing of youth sector programmes in accordance with the regulations governing the public interest in the youth sector (ibid., Article 21).

There are two types of membership of youth organisations: individual and collective. Individual membership applies to societies in which individuals become members, while collective membership applies to societies that are joined together within an association of societies. As far as the organisation of national youth organisations is concerned, we can distinguish between organisations that operate as associations

of societies and whose local units are organised as societies, and organisations whose local units are not independent legal entities. Organisations are, in principle, built from the bottom up, which means that individuals come together in local-level organisations that are, in turn, part of national and (hypothetically also) international/European organisations. However, other ways of building organisations have emerged in practice. Most national youth organisations are involved in international cooperation and are members of international youth organisations.

There are currently 14 organisations in Slovenia that have national youth organisation status: the Youth Council of the Firefighting Association of Slovenia; the Slovenian Catholic Girl Guides and Boy Scouts Association; Slovenian Democratic Youth (Slovenska demokratska mladina), which is the youth wing of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS); Društvo mladinski ceh; the Association of Student Clubs of Slovenia; Mlada Slovenija (Young Slovenia); the Slovenian Scouts Association; Mladi forum SD, the youth wing of the Social Democrats; the Alpine Association of Slovenia; Nova generacija SLS, the youth wing of the Slovenian People's Party; the Slovenian Rural Youth Association; the Trade Union of Students, Pupils and Young Unemployed; the Youth Network No Excuse Slovenia (Mladinska zveza brez izgovora Slovenija); and the Pomurje Hungary Youth Society (Muravidéki Magyar Ifjúsági Szervezet). Six of these 14 organisations are organised within larger organisations, and include four political party youth organisations; the remainder are organised as societies or associations of societies. One organisation has acquired national youth organisation status as an organisation that brings together representatives of the Hungarian national community.

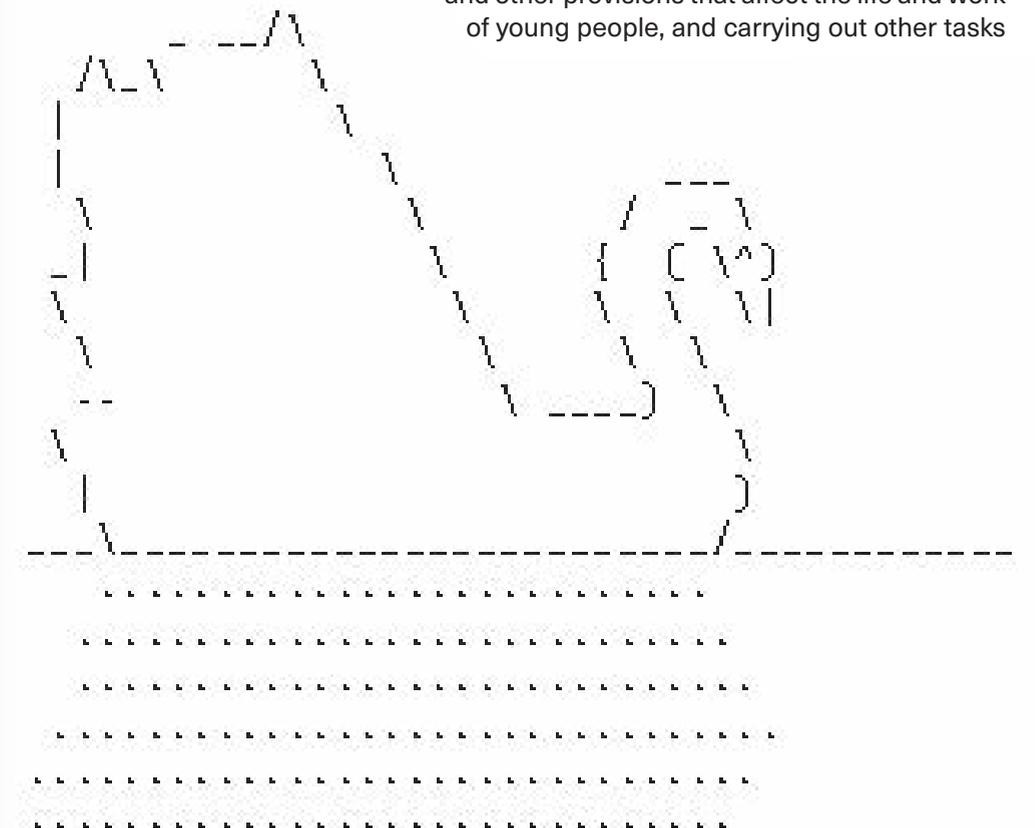
Most of the national member organisations of the National Youth Council began to be systematically founded at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, and were heavily influenced by the transition to the new, more pluralistic social and political system. The abolition of the Socialist Youth League of Slovenia (Zveza socialistične mladine Slovenije, ZSMS), which took the decision in October 1989 to turn itself into a political party, also led to a significant rise in the number of youth organisations. The transition processes subsequently paved the way for the creation of new political parties and youth wings. In the transition period, these youth wings also occupied an important position in youth organisation and the youth sector, and have retained that role to the present day. Their influence on the sector has changed over the years, although they have had an impact on the development of the youth sector and youth policy in Slovenia throughout, mainly through the National Youth Council. The wave of new youth organisations included, in addition to political party youth wings, a large number of independent lay organisations covering the activities formerly conducted under the auspices of the Roman Catholic church (Škulj, 2016). They have also played an important role in the youth sector.



## National Youth Council of Slovenia and local youth councils

Youth councils are civil society organisations that play a significant role in representing the interests of young people and those of youth organisations generally. As umbrella associations of youth organisations, they provide a space for youth participation and the joint delivery of activities. Youth councils operate at national level (National Youth Council of Slovenia) or within local communities (local youth councils). Youth councils are founded and operate in accordance with the Youth Councils Act (Zakon o mladinskih svetih), which defines them as voluntary associations of youth organisations. In the case of the National Youth Council, member organisations must have acquired national youth organisation status in accordance with the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, while local youth councils bring together youth organisations headquartered in the same local self-government unit or municipality (Youth Councils Act, 2000, Article 2). Membership of the National Youth Council and local youth councils is based on the principles of free association, equality and mutual respect for the autonomy of each organisation. The national and local councils represent the interests of their member youth organisations. The Youth Councils Act provides that youth councils shall operate under the provisions of the public interest act when performing (or participating in the performance) of youth work and other youth sector activities, securing the proper conditions for the operation and development of interest-based forms of youth association, enabling young people to take part in the adoption of legal and other provisions that affect the life and work of young people, and carrying out other tasks

A Bit of a Mix



that promote the interests of the young laid down in their founding act (Youth Councils Act, Article 5).

Article 6 of the Youth Councils Act, which is a key article for youth councils, gives an indication of the importance of the position they hold, and in some sense also of their involvement in the public policy process when decisions are being made on youth-related matters. According to that article, the government, ministries and other central government and local authorities are required to notify the National Youth Council or local youth councils before drafting laws and other regulations that have a direct impact on the life and work of young people (Youth Councils Act, Article 6). One of the indicators of good youth policy is how secure and well-defined the position of youth councils is, with the participation of young people in the creation and delivery of youth policies being regarded as one of the key elements. As representatives of the interests of youth organisations and young people, youth councils are meant to occupy a central position in relations between decision-makers and young people, and to have a privileged role as a partner to political decision-makers in developing and delivering youth policies.

The development of youth councils in Slovenia began in April 1990, when the National Youth Council of Slovenia, which took as its basis the practices of similar structures in other Western European countries, was founded in response to the void that had been created in the organised youth field following the dissolution/transformation of the Socialist Youth League of Slovenia. By signing the founding document, the National Youth Council established 17 organisations active in the youth field with the aim of representing and promoting the common interests of young people and youth organisations in their relations with social institutions, particularly state authorities. However, in the 1990s local youth councils were unable to establish themselves in a formal sense as there was no legal basis that would allow them to do so. Ljubljana Youth Council, for example, began operating in 1996, but was not registered until 2001, when the required legal basis was obtained with the adoption of the Youth Councils Act (Baumkirher et al., 2012). This lack of a legal basis also affected the operations of the National Youth Council, which at one point at the end of the 1990s was even removed from the register and had its company registration number deleted. This was followed by the closure of its bank account in 2000 (ibid.). The legislation in force at the time did not give the National Youth Council the option of acquiring legal personality, mainly because of the links between member organisations organised under the provisions of the Societies Act (Zakon o društvih) and those governed by the Political Parties Act (Zakon o političnih strankah), as it also included the youth wings of political parties (Škulj, 2016). Efforts to overcome this situation began with preparations for the drafting of the Youth Councils Act, which was adopted in 2000. This provided the necessary legal basis for the existence and operation of youth councils by establishing them as legal entities *sui generis*. Under that law and the Rules on Registration and the Maintenance of the Youth Councils Register (Pravilnik o registraciji in vodenju registra mladinskih svetov), the National Youth Council was officially registered in 2002, although the first youth council to register was Ljubljana Youth Council.

## National Youth Council of Slovenia

The main purpose of the National Youth Council as set out in its statutes is to contribute to creating an environment that enables young people to develop into the

kind of adults that society needs in the future and, along with this, to attempt to ensure that young people are autonomous, solidarity-minded, responsible and engaged (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2018, Article 7). The main tasks laid down in the statutes are extensive: to enable young people to take part in the adoption of legal and other regulations that affect their lives; put in place conditions that facilitate the operation and development of interest-based forms of youth association; advocate for young people and youth organisations; carry out and help develop youth work; foster the development of youth organisations as an instrument for young people in society and their active participation in public life; promote the development of voluntary forms of youth organisation; coordinate and support the operations of local youth organisations; work with other youth sector organisations and non-governmental organisations; and represent young people and youth organisations at home and abroad (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2018, Article 8). The National Youth Council is recognised as the central civil society player in the youth policy field. This role is also acknowledged by other stakeholders in the youth sector and more widely, and has been officially granted to the National Youth Council, as the umbrella youth organisation in Slovenia, by the relevant legislative framework.

The National Youth Council is one of the main instigators of and key players in the development of youth policy and the youth sector in Slovenia. Since the outset, its international connections have enabled it to gain an insight into how the youth sector is regulated in other countries, and provided the impetus for the transfer of good practice to Slovenia. International involvement has also raised its credibility with the profession and the public; and by working with international youth organisations as well as with Council of Europe and European Union institutions, it has been able to raise awareness of the importance of youth structures and youth policy, thereby raising its credibility still further. It has used and popularised terms such as 'youth policy' and 'youth work', taken from practices abroad, which has allowed them, over time, to gain a clear meaning in Slovenia as well. Youth policy has therefore been understood to be policy in the field of young people and youth organisations created jointly by the public and youth sectors, while youth work is taken to mean specific work with young people or the voluntary involvement of young people within the youth sector, covers various interest-based fields and helps to improve the position of young people (Baumkirher et al., 2012). In the 1990s the National Youth Council also began laying legislative groundwork for the youth sector, but these efforts were unsuccessful. However, it did assume an important role as youth sector partner after 2003, during the process that eventually led to the formulation and adoption of the Public Interest in the Youth Sector, as well as in the intervening period in which the adoption process was stalled, when it drew up its own draft youth work and youth policy law. This helped to ensure that discussions around the public interest act did not die away and that the adoption process did not come to a complete halt.

Alongside its active involvement in drafting legislation, the National Youth Council's regular engagement with public policies affecting the young is also reflected in its other areas of work. Of particular importance is its involvement as a partner in the formulation of the National Youth Programme, the text of which it drafted in collaboration with the Office for Youth. It therefore took part in the consultations held with ministries, and also led the civil dialogue with other youth sector organisations. The set of programming documents that it developed at the Youth Policy Committee (Komisija za mladinske politike) and that form the substantive foundation for its

advocacy work are the basis for its work in this area. The programming documents, which were drawn up over an intensive period between 2009 and 2011 (some were later updated), cover the areas of youth organisation, employment, education, housing, information provision, participation, health, mobility and youth volunteering.

Over the years the National Youth Council's advocacy work has also been complemented by other documents produced in the course of projects and collaborations with other organisations. These include the Resolution on the Recognition of Non-Formal Education in Slovenia (Resolucija o priznavanju neformalnega izobraževanja v Sloveniji), the Young People's Say on the Environment (Deklaracija mladi o okolju), the Resolution on the Development of the Youth Sector and Youth Policy 2014 (Resolucija o razvoju mladinskega sektorja in mladinske politike 2014), the Agreement on Intergenerational Cooperation (Dogovor o medgeneracijskem sodelovanju), and the Commitment of the Slovenian Youth Sector and the Office for Youth for the Health of Young People in Slovenia (Zaveza slovenskega mladinskega sektorja in Urada RS za mladino za zdravje mladih v Sloveniji). The National Youth Council is involved in every aspect of advocacy through a variety of different activities, from direct collaboration with institutions and the representatives of the executive and legislative branches of power, particularly the Office for Youth, to individual advocacy campaigns designed to raise general public awareness of certain issues.

Membership of the National Youth Council has fluctuated considerably over the last three decades. A total of 38 youth organisations have joined it at some point, from the original 17 founding organisations in 1990 (Baumkirher et al., 2012). Today it comprises 11 full members (Društvo Mladinski ceh, Mlada Slovenija, Mladi forum socialnih demokratov, the Alpine Association of Slovenia Youth Committee, the Youth Network No Excuse Slovenia, Nova generacija SLS, Slovenian Democratic Youth, the Slovenian Catholic Girl Guides and Boy Scouts Association, the Slovenian Rural Youth Association, the Association of Student Clubs of Slovenia, Zveza ŠKIS and the Slovenian Scouts Association) and two associate members (the Youth Unit of Društvo ŠKUC/Slovenian Student Cultural Centre and Popotniško združenje Slovenije, which is part of the Hostelling International federation). The Youth Councils Act has had the greatest impact on national council membership, as it stipulates that membership is only open to organisations with official national youth organisation status. According to its rules of operation, the National Youth Council accepts organisations with national youth organisation status as full members and other youth organisations as associate members, with the statutes requiring associate members to operate in the youth sector, have at least 50 members and be active in at least three statistical regions. Two events in particular have had a strong impact on membership: the entry into force of the current membership requirements in 2013 (official national youth organisation status) and the departure of youth organisations within larger non-governmental organisations as a result of the legal requirements stipulated by the Youth Councils Act in 2000 (which provided that, with respect to youth organisations that were part of other, larger organisations, membership should be restricted to the youth sections of political parties). In addition to a failure to meet the status-related requirements, organisations have also left the national council as a result of being inactive or ceasing to exist.

In addition to the international operations outlined above, the National Youth Council is a member of several international youth organisations and platforms. In 1993 it joined the Council of European National Youth Committees (CENYC) as an associate

member, becoming a full member two years later. In that same year it became an associate member of the Youth Forum of the European Communities (YFEC) and a full member of the World Assembly of Youth (WAY) (Škulj, 2016). In 1996 it helped set up the Youth Forum Jeunesse/European Youth Forum (YFJ), which replaced three previous youth platforms in Europe, and became a full member upon its establishment. Slovenian representatives have always been very active in European youth organisations and the European Youth Forum, serving three terms as president of the YFJ, for example: Tine Radinja in 2009–10 and Peter Matjašič in 2011–14 (two terms).

## Local youth councils

Local youth councils perform the role and activities of umbrella youth organisations at local level, i.e. within the local community in which they are registered, in the same way as the National Youth Council does at national level. However, this analogy, where the national is simply mirrored by the local, does not mean that the national council is the umbrella association of local youth councils: there is no such formal connection between them, nor is there any formal connection between local youth councils themselves. The only connection, at an informal level, exists within the national council, which coordinates and supports the operations of local youth councils. As part of its annual programme or individual activities, the National Youth Council therefore monitors local youth councils, provides them with information and assistance in

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coordination, carries out education and training (which it incorporates into its own activities) and works with them on Structured Dialogue and other projects. There are currently 42 local youth councils, although this number is not necessarily indicative of how active they are — for example, three municipalities have two registered youth councils and, in the case of ten local youth councils, their last status-related change in the register was ten or more years ago.

A more indicative figure on the actual level of local youth council activity would be the number of activities registered in the public call for applications for the co-funding of local youth council activities in 2018 and 2019, published by the Office for Youth, to which only nine local youth councils applied. The number of registered local youth councils is therefore low (given that Slovenia has 212 municipalities) and their level of activity is even lower. The National Youth Council attributes this passivity to a lack of understanding of the role and importance of youth councils on the part of municipal authorities, the departure of young people from provincial areas to university centres, and the absence of an orderly funding system (Baumkirher et al., 2012). To this we might add the size of municipalities (or rather, their diminutive size in many cases) and the fact that the youth sector is poorly developed in some local environments (they simply have too few youth organisations). There is also a lack of capacity on the part of local communities and young people themselves to enable these structures to operate in the first place.

## Youth centres

Youth centres, which focus on the socialisation of young people and involve them in prevention, non-formal education, voluntary work, cultural, leisure and other animation programmes, are crucial to the delivery of youth work (Murn et al., 2011). By legal definition, youth centres are organised functional centres for young people that carry out youth sector programmes and youth work at local level (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 8). Their tasks are diverse, and largely conditioned by the environment in which they are located. This means that they are dependent, among other things, on the needs of young people, the level of development of the youth sector and civil society organisation, and the structure of opportunities for young people. Generally speaking, youth centres' tasks range from creating and securing conditions or environments in which young people can work, get together and pursue their interests, to carrying out their own programmes for young people. Youth centres also and at the same time provide a space in which the necessary infrastructure for the performance of youth work is made available to young people, and where qualified staff are on hand to provide support for youth work.

Youth centres carry out tasks and operations designed to create the conditions for the development of creative young people who think critically. Their objectives are to promote youth participation, foster active citizenship, support multi-cultural education and, in particular, integrate young people through a better understanding of their position and role in society (Murn et al., 2011). They achieve this with the help of a wide range of programmes and activities that provide advisory, technical, organisational, financial, technical and other forms of support to voluntary associations, autonomous youth groups and individuals. In this sense, youth centres have several different functions in relation to prevention, association, the provision of services and information, education and development (ibid.). The Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act defined the way in which youth centres should be organised in legal terms,

and did so fairly widely: a youth centre should be provided by the local community or another legal entity governed by private law or by a natural person (Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act, Article 28). However, while the inclusive definition contained in the law prioritises regulation by the local community, historical development and various local contexts mean that the door is left open to everyone. A glance at the applications to the Office for Youth's public call reveals the same, with an ever-increasing number of public institutes applying; this reflects a gradual strengthening of awareness of the importance of youth work at local level. Alongside an increase in the number of registered public institutes, there is an upward trend in the number of funding beneficiaries among youth centres, including other organisations.

Although youth centres began to appear in Slovenia in the 1990s, with that early development conditional upon the level of social responsibility of individuals locally and how active they were in working with young activists (who generally came from youth organisations, Murn et al., 2011), they began to develop mainly in the second half of that decade as institutions that provided infrastructure and support to youth activities, and as organisations in which young people gathered. The Office for Youth has, over the years, made a number of important strides forward, managing to motivate some local communities to set up youth centres and providing them with direct financial support. European programmes have also played a part by financing projects in the absence of other systemic sources of funds, while local community support through public institutions has been focused on providing infrastructure and maintaining at least minimum staff coverage. Programme funding has generally not been available, which means that work has proceeded in line with the capacities for funding individual projects, through voluntary work and with the adoption of 'innovative' approaches to project delivery on the part of young people themselves (ibid.). An important step forward in the development of youth centres in Slovenia came with their inclusion in the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act.

More systematic connections between youth centres were formed in response to the needs of young people and as youth centres themselves gradually began to see the benefits that could be gained from networking. This culminated in the establishment, for the first time, of an informal network of 13 youth centres in 2001. Four years later, this network outgrew its informal framework with the establishment of the MaMa Youth Network. MaMa's main purpose is to connect youth centres and represent their interests vis-à-vis the government sector, decision-makers and other stakeholders. Today it comprises 50 organisations that perform youth centre activities throughout Slovenia (MaMa Youth Network, n.d). MaMa's activities include bringing together youth centres and other organisations active in youth work, defending the interests of its member organisations in relation to other stakeholders, providing its member organisations with information and expert assistance, conducting non-formal education programmes for young people and youth workers, and carrying out various national and international projects. It is also involved in strengthening the capacities of youth centres and youth work at local level, and promoting creativity and active participation on the part of young people (ibid.). The Ustanova nevladnih mladinskega polja Pohorski bataljon, founded in 2010, is another NGO that collects organisations and individuals together to organise youth centre activities in Slovenia.

One of the most important functions of youth centres is to provide infrastructure for the performance of youth work. They are, in some sense, multi-purpose public spaces for young people that lend support to practically all entities in the youth sphere

(Boljka et al., 2011). The Office for Youth addressed the importance of well-developed youth infrastructure to the performance and development of youth work in its analysis of 2019, which looked at the effects of investments in the development of a public network of multi-purpose youth centres from ERDF 2007–2013 funds.<sup>4</sup> It concluded that the effects of the co-financing of investments in youth centres' youth tourism infrastructure were extremely positive in terms of business, finance and content. Youth centres with a well-developed infrastructure have also shown themselves to be more successful in obtaining funds earmarked for youth work (Office for Youth, 2019).<sup>5</sup> In addition to increasing the scope of their programmes and as a result of an expansion of their spatial capacities, youth centres have also become providers of support activities, as they are able to provide space to other youth sector organisations. Youth centres with strong infrastructure have modern premises and accommodation capacities at their disposal for the performance of youth-related activities; at the same time, they are able to provide young people with the opportunity to make use of infrastructure for multi-day non-formal youth education and mobility programmes (Fujan, 2019).

### **Other non-governmental organisations in the youth field**

There is another group of non-governmental organisations that, unlike national youth organisations, youth centres and youth councils, are fairly undefined — indeed, they go unmentioned in the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act. Nevertheless, they have been present in the youth sector for quite some time and are defined as 'other organisations' mainly in public calls for the co-funding of youth work programmes. This group comprises youth organisations and organisations for young people that provide youth programmes and programmes for young people at national level; it also contains organisations that the Office for Youth recognises as providing support programmes and services for young people, i.e. programmes designed to improve the quality of youth work, youth policy or the position of young people in Slovenia. While they are occasionally referred to as 'network organisations' in certain contexts, this has not become an established term because the way they are organised does not correspond to the concept of a network.

In the most recent period of youth sector development, this group of other NGOs has been joined by new (private) institutions whose activities cover specific thematic niches within the youth sector, contribute to the development of the youth sector as a whole and provide support to other organisations in the field. They include the MaMa Youth Network, which, as we have seen, brings together and represents organisations that perform youth centre activities in Slovenia; Zavod Nefiks, which has developed a system that enables young people to systematically collect all the knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal education in Slovenia and certified by organisations; the Institute for Youth Policy (Inštitut za mladinsko politiko), which promotes the development of local youth policy, provides local communities with expert support in the systemic regulation of the youth field, and also administers and awards the

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<sup>4</sup> Ten youth centres with accommodation capacities were set up across the country using ERDF funds in the 2007–2013 programming period, in the following statistical regions: one in Goriška, three in Koroška, one in Podravska, two in Savinjska, two in Posavska and one in Zasavska.

<sup>5</sup> The analysis includes funds drawn down in the 2014–2019 period via the public call for applications for the co-co-funding of youth work programmes, ESF calls for applications for youth sector organisations, and the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

Youth-Friendly Municipality Certificate; the SLOAM Youth Agency, founded in 1999, which administers the European Youth Card programme in Slovenia and is a full member of the European Youth Card Association (EYCA); and Zavod MISSS (Mladinsko informativno svetovalno središče Slovenije), which is a national youth information and advisory centre that conducts social security and youth work programmes and is a member of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA).

### **Dimensions of the youth sector in Slovenia**

Although the shortcomings of any quantitative approach to measuring the size of the youth sector are well known, we can learn a good deal by looking at some basic statistics. There are 106 organisations that have acquired the status of organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector in Slovenia; they include youth councils and public institutes active in the youth field. This number rises to 185 if we add youth councils and public institutions.

To finance youth programmes and programmes for young people, the Office for Youth regularly makes funds available through its public call, which is aimed at the three groups of eligible youth sector organisations mentioned earlier in this chapter: national youth organisations, youth centres and other non-governmental organisations (youth councils are not eligible for funding through these public calls).

A total of EUR 3.5 million was earmarked for the last public call (EUR 1.45 million for 2020 and the same amount for 2021). Since 2014, when there was a significant reduction, the funds available through the public call have gradually risen to the level seen prior to the financial and economic crisis. They have remained steady at that level since 2018 (see Figure 1). That said, the money available does not reflect the needs of youth sector organisations, whose numbers have increased over time — as is also evident by the increasing number of organisations responding to the public call. It is also worth noting that the stagnation in the level of funding reserved for the public call constitutes a de facto cut, as applicant organisations are being compelled, to quite a considerable extent, to address challenges (in public health and finance) that not central to their concerns.

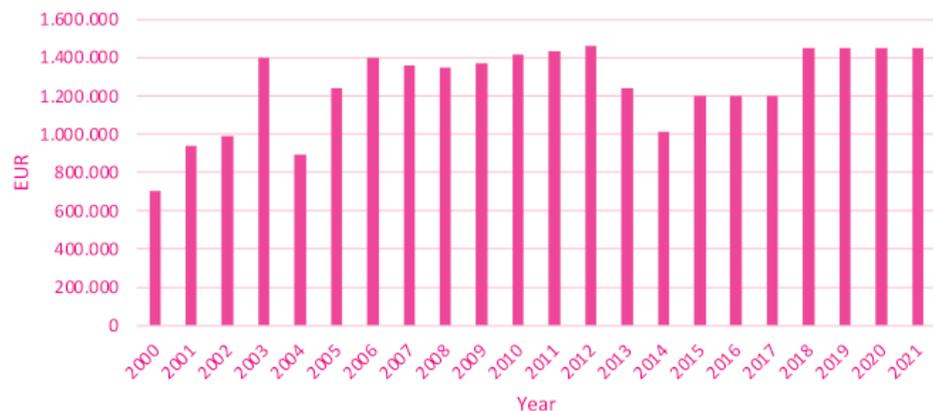


Figure 1: Office for Youth funds made available through the public call for the funding of youth work programmes. Source: Office for Youth (2021)

The Office for Youth also funds the work and programmes of the National Youth Council and the national agency for European youth programmes (Zavod MOVIT) through the central government budget, to which can be added the funds that the Office for Youth draws from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the funds available to the youth sector via the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Figure 2 shows the structure of funds available to youth sector organisations between 2014 and 2020, where the ESF funds only include funds from the EU Financial Perspective 2014–2020. The total funding available over that period therefore amounted to EUR 44,060,064.95 – a not inconsiderable sum for the sector (it should be noted that funds allocated to the sector by local communities are not covered here if they do not come from the programmes referred to above, nor do they include funds provided through other international programmes).

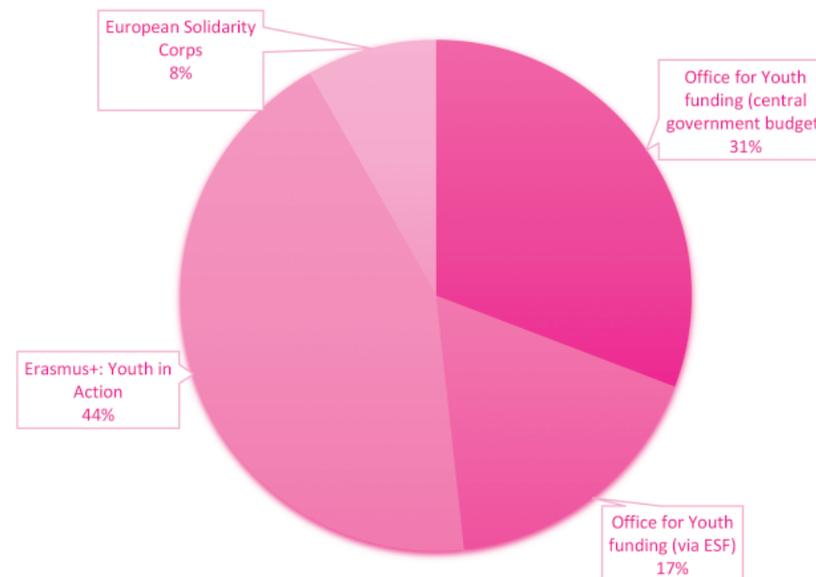
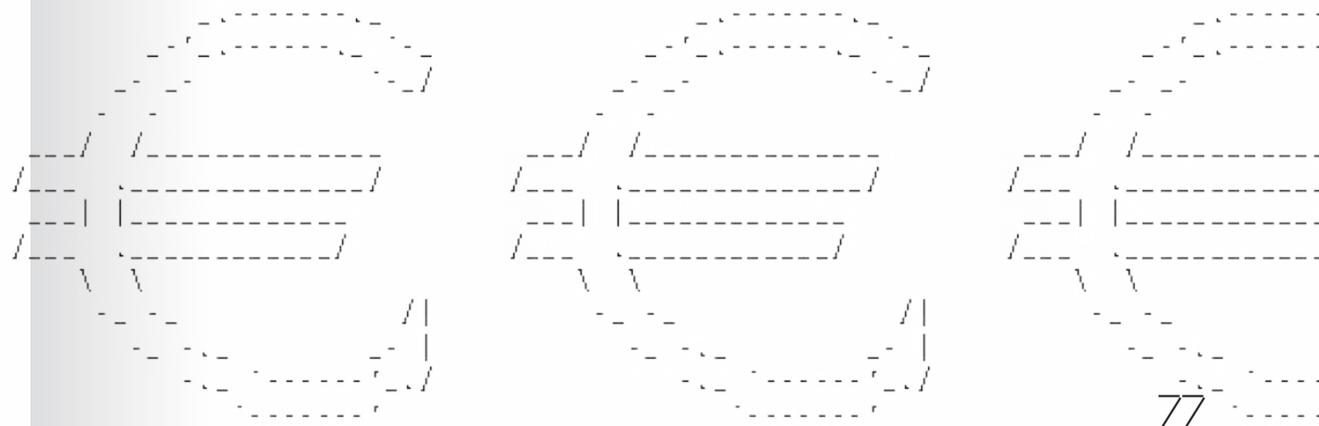
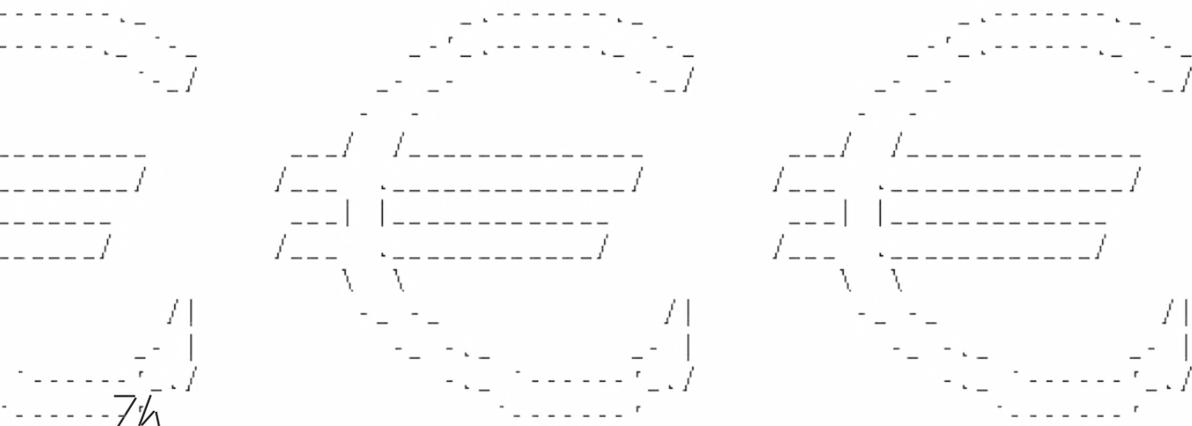


Figure 2: Structure of funds available for the youth sector 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on financial data received.

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In terms of source, Office for Youth funds can be divided into those allocated to the youth sector from the central government budget and those allocated from the ESF. The Office deploys ESF funds for youth employment, specifically within the context of active citizenship, the aim being to secure involvement in one of the central themes of youth work: encouraging young people to become active citizens. In this period, the Office published three public calls for applications using funds from the Financial Perspective 2014–2020: two for projects carried out by youth sector organisations and one for the co-funding of the employment of youth workers in youth sector organisations. The structure of the Office's funds therefore shows that two thirds of the money received from the central government budget were allocated to the public call and one third to the MSS and Zavod MOVIT (see Figure 3).



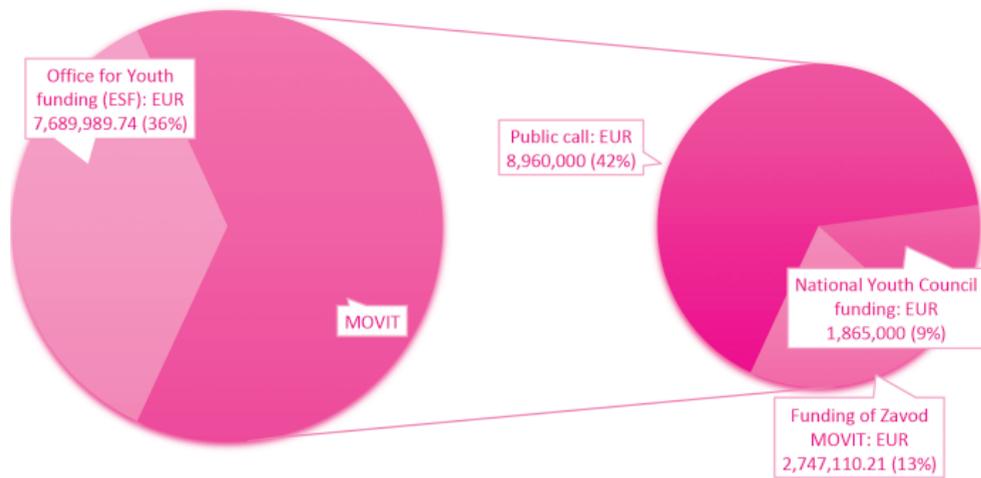


Figure 3: Structure of funds available to the Office for Youth 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on data received from the Office for Youth.

Funds from the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes should be understood as complementing those allocated to the youth sector by the Office for Youth. They make an important additional contribution to the development of organisations and youth work not only in Slovenia but elsewhere in Europe (see Figure 4). As the funds made available by these two programmes increase year by year, they have already exceeded, as a percentage, the budget funds allocated to the youth sector by Slovenia; this has had a significant impact on the focus of development of youth work in the country. The funds allocated from the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes totalled EUR 22,797,965 in the 2014–2020 period: EUR 19,167,134 for Youth in Action (84.1%) and EUR 3,630,831 for the European Solidarity Corps (15.9%).<sup>6</sup>

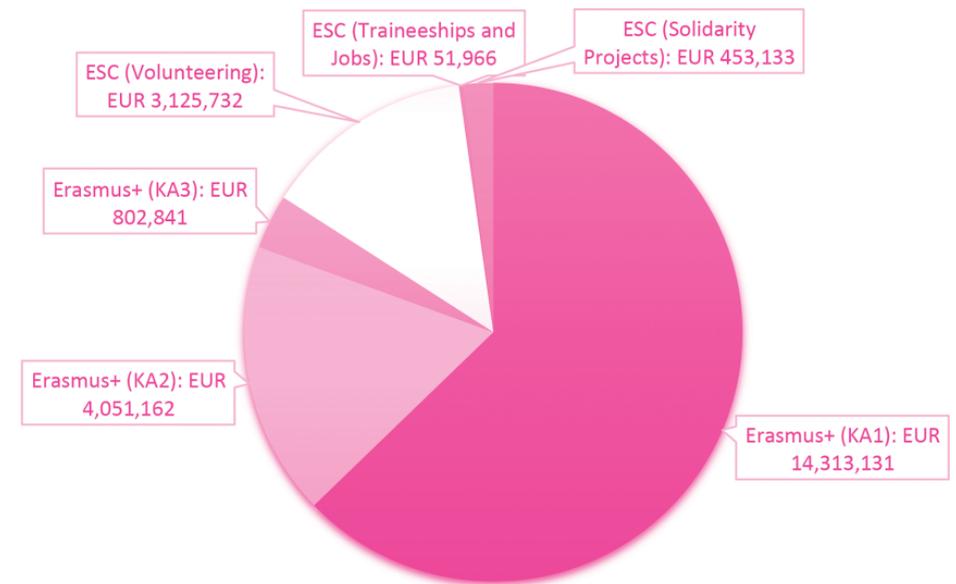


Figure 4: Structure of funds allocated under Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on data received from Zavod MOVIT.

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Unlike the public calls and tenders issued by the Office for Youth, Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps funds are not allocated exclusively to youth sector organisations. Organisations with public interest in the youth sector status put forward a total of 715 projects for funding in the 2014–2020 period: 371 were accepted (both programmes together) and grant funding totalling EUR 9,290,182 was allocated. This included 575 projects in the Erasmus+ programme (296 accepted, grants of EUR 7,387,912 allocated) and 140 projects under the European Solidarity Corps (2018–2020 only; 75 projects accepted and grants of EUR 1,902,270 allocated).

<sup>6</sup> The European Solidarity Corps programme was only in place for three of the years in question (2018–2020).

Alongside the funds allocated by Zavod MOVIT are those provided to various projects by the national agencies of other countries in which organisations from Slovenia act as project partners. In the 2014–2020 period, the Erasmus+ programme accepted 2,572 projects from other national agencies; Slovenian organisations were involved in 2,626 of these projects. Between 2018 and 2020, 109 projects from other national agencies were accepted by the European Solidarity Corps programme, with 109 Slovenian partner organisations involved in these applications. This shows the strong involvement of Slovenian organisations in the international environment, as well as their success in competing for co-funding — which provides a considerable boost to youth sector organisations and youth workers in Slovenia, and to some extent an additional inflow of funds for youth-centred activities within the country.

### **Diversity of the youth sector: strength or weakness?**

The youth sector is a specific part of civil society, with a mosaic of different organisations that differ from each other in terms of organisational type (youth organisations and organisations for young people) as well as organisational form: from societies, associations of societies, and the youth wings of political parties and trade unions on the one hand, to private and public institutions and even social companies on the other. This diversity of organisation brings specific features to the operation of the youth sector that other fields or sectors do not possess to the same extent. To this we can add the diversity of the types of area in which youth sector organisations operate. This makes the search for common denominators (beyond those of delivering and caring for young people, of course) a major challenge. An awareness of this puts the existence of an umbrella law in an entirely new light and, at the same time, goes some way to explaining the challenges that accompanied the adoption of the law and that remain relevant to its implementation.

The breadth of the areas in which the youth sector operates is already clear from the legal definitions that are applied to it, which continue to expand and evolve. This diversity of content very clearly reflects the diversity of young people's interests; and if these interests were to be reduced to a 'select few', young people would be forced into universal models. This would not be beneficial to their overall development or address the very different contexts in which they live. Youth sector organisations try to respond to these needs and interests as far as possible by working with young people to develop projects and programmes suitable for them. Far from simply being a 'topic' within the youth sector, participation is the most prominent of the concerns with which organisations engage in practice; it is also and above all a focal point of the methodology that organisations incorporate into their activities as a central attribute. This is also how Katarina Nučič, a youth worker of many years' standing, understands it. 'Active participation,' she points out, 'is the ultimate thing on which we should build. Content is then already brought into line with needs. Participation as methodology will have impacts' (interview, 15 April 2021).<sup>7</sup>

We should also mention the areas related to inclusion, engagement and cooperation within the community that are enhanced by participation, such as voluntary work, human rights and intercultural dialogue. The activities grouped within this area are largely aimed at creating responsible and active citizens, and strengthening key social and civic competencies. Other key areas include social inclusion, equal

opportunities, employment and enterprise; these cover a wide range of challenges faced by young people and are closely linked to their independence and transition into adulthood. In these areas, activities can be divided into those that consolidate young people's competencies and knowledge through education and training, and those that raise young people's awareness and the awareness of wider society of the issues young people face. Culture and creativity also occupy an important place in the youth sector, with young people engaged as consumers as well as creators. The youth sector offers young people a space in which youth culture can develop; in the social sense, this provides an alternative to the prevailing culture and, at the same time, an important means of emancipation.

The youth sector is also to some extent marked by the crises that bring the most pressing (social) issues to the surface. The economic and financial crisis that began in 2008 highlighted the problem of youth unemployment, which then migrated to other areas of the youth sector. This led to the provision of dedicated funds by the EU to tackle the issue via a variety of programmes. Similar trends can also be seen in the case of the environmental crisis and the public health crisis occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought to the fore (once again) the issue of young people's physical and mental health, human rights, participation, access to education, and (not least) the digital transformation of the sector and its activities.

Partly in response to the needs of young people and partly in order to take full advantage of the financial opportunities on offer, organisations have adapted their projects and programmes to these recent events, seeking ways of surviving, growing and linking their organisational mission with the public policy objectives in place at any one time. Some have been successful in this, others less so; but it does seem that organisations for young people have found it easier to adapt to these disruptions, while youth organisations have found the changes in circumstances, the requirement to change their ways of working and the emergence of topics 'from outside' much more of a challenge. One of the reasons for this could also lie in the professionalisation of youth organisations, this being one of the important elements in an organisation's ability to handle the financing methods usually introduced by programmes that come from fields outside youth and do not have the integrated logic of the youth field (the European Social Fund, for example). However, these external factors, which have had an impact on the development of the sector, have also led the sector to shift increasingly towards the provision of services, which is a departure from the traditional understanding of how youth work is organised. Many are critical of this shift, among them Uroš Skrinar, director of Zavod MOVIT, who adds that financing is not adequately regulated because it fails to take a development-oriented approach and, at the same time, compels far too many organisations to settle for project funding because they believe that this is their only option (interview, 7 May 2021) — and perhaps it is.

It is diversity that enriches the youth sector and makes it more interesting to the public and to young people themselves. It means that young people are able to find something, within the wide range of fields and activities, that responds to their needs and interests. On the other hand, the diversity of youth sector actors and their interests presented a challenge when the umbrella law was being adopted, with disagreements among them leading to the idea that a 'slimmed down' law that mainly laid the foundations for operation and a basis for a national programme (Rakar et al., 2011) was the only feasible option. While the process of drafting the Public Interest in the

<sup>7</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

Youth Sector Act showed the considerable power of the youth sector at the level of process, it also demonstrated the influence that some organisations or groups of organisations had on the public policy process. This balance of power is most evident in the composition of the Government Council for Youth (Svet vlade za mladino), where national actors, in combination with the National Youth Council and national youth organisations, have been handed the most power. At the same time, the Slovenian Student Union (Študentska organizacija Slovenije) demonstrated its considerable power when the Council for Youth was being set up, as the latter did not take over the role of the Government Council for Student Affairs (Svet študentska vprašanja). There have been recent indications that those disagreements that used to exist between actors in the youth sector have to some extent been overcome, as suggested by the large number of collaborations between the umbrella organisations in the field of advocacy. This could point the way forward to possible future refinements or upgrades to the public interest act.

The development of the youth sector in Slovenia over the last three decades has been marked above all the adoption of the umbrella law and the legislative arrangements it has brought in its wake. That moment should be regarded as a turning point for vertical youth policy in particular, and one that introduced a systemic approach into the youth sector (Tadej Beočanin, interview, 15 April 2021). We might also see the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act not merely as a turning point in the process of development, but also as one of the pillars providing appropriate support to the youth sector and as a starting point for action in other areas relevant to young people (Nučič, interview, 15 April 2021). This is particularly important given the cross-sectoral character of youth policy and the operation of the youth sector. Within this regulated legislative framework, representatives of public authorities at both national and local level, who are responsible for drafting, adopting and delivering youth policy, also have an important part to play.

As a national authority that youth sector actors recognise as needing to be given greater powers, in terms of status as well as those of financing and staffing, the Office for Youth provides an important substantive framework for the functioning and regulation of the youth sector. While Zavod MOVIT complements the work of the Office for Youth in an important way by carrying out European programmes and securing funds for youth work projects, it needs to further extend that complementary role by working with the Office to unify the direction of travel of the youth sector — something that is perhaps less visible under the current arrangements because of the absence of a clear policy and strategy on the part of the Office and the way the status of the national agency is regulated. Organisations themselves, such as national organisations, the National Youth Council, local youth councils and youth centres, are key to the operation of the sector. It is from these organisations that most youth work and youth policy originates, in response to the needs that they encounter (Tine Radinja, interview, 9 April 2021; Beočanin, interview 15 April 2021).

## Looking towards the future

Uninterrupted and long-term funding must be provided to improve the quality of work and professionalise youth sector organisations. Financing should be oriented towards development and to encouraging organisations to realise their strategic policies, at the same time enabling programme implementation to be adjusted as required to the needs of young people as they arise.

With the aim of strengthening youth policy and youth organisation, the network and position of youth centres within local communities should be consolidated so that their work can have a stronger impact within the local youth policy context.

Contact between national and local youth sector organisations should be strengthened in relation to the transfer of knowledge and experience; this will help them to tackle the challenges faced by young people jointly. To this end, permanent mechanisms should be established to foster the development of the youth sector and youth work at local level.

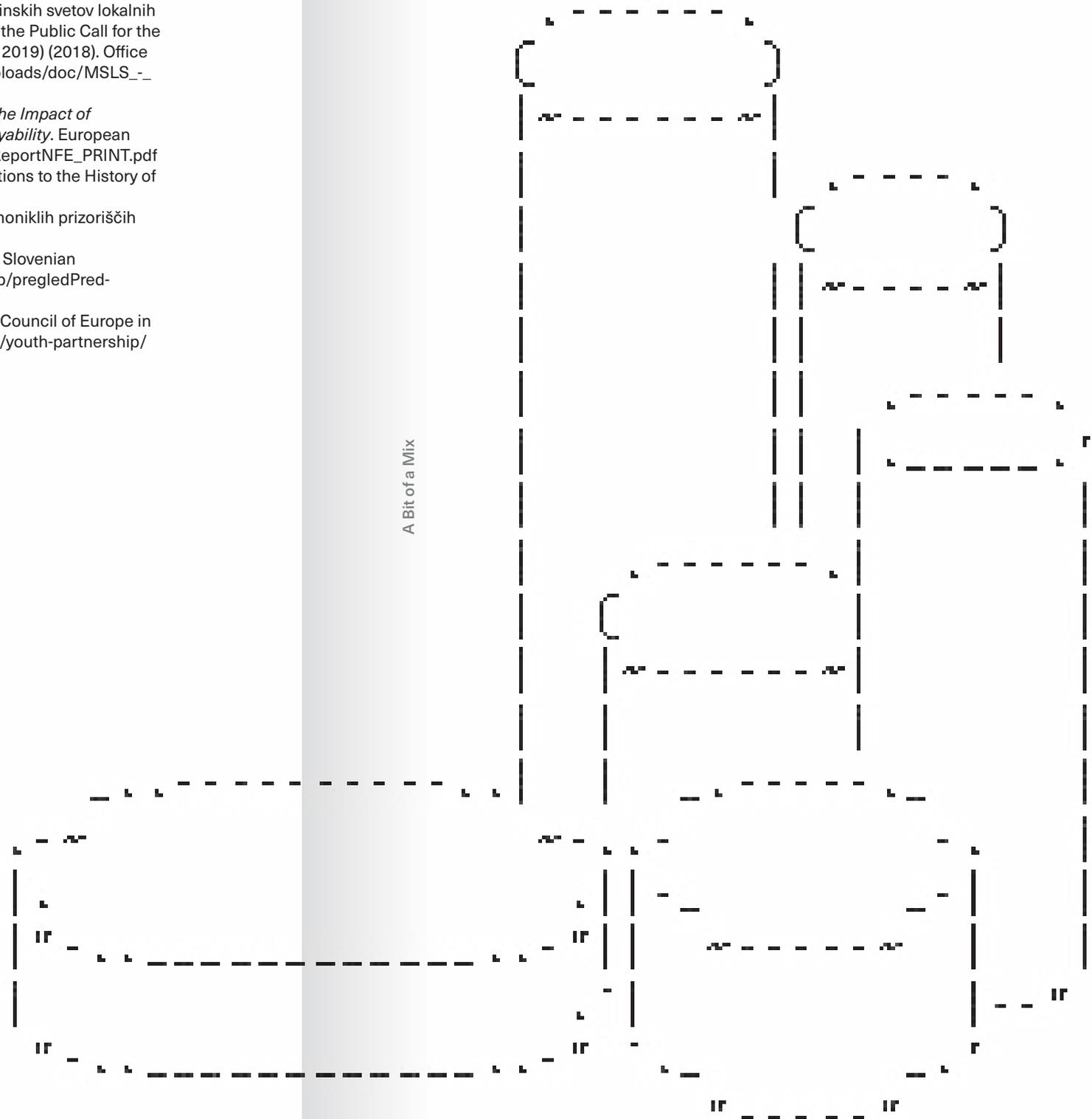
More attention and funding needs to be given to youth infrastructure as the basis for the delivery of high-quality youth work. It would also be beneficial for the sector to establish a structure to facilitate a comprehensive and professional approach to developing and improving youth work.

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A Bit of a Mix

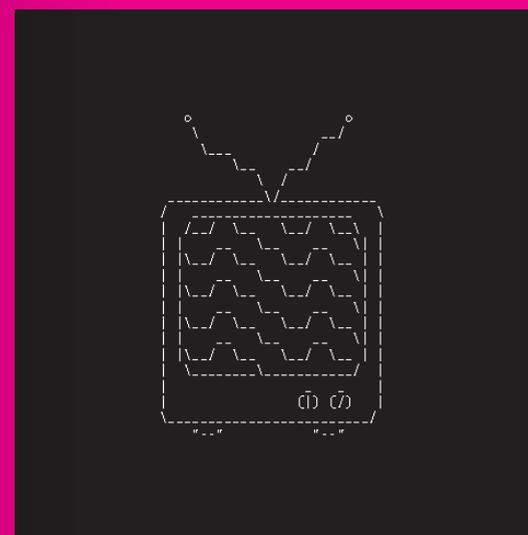




## Chapter 4

# No Youth Without Europe

The Impact  
of European  
Programmes on  
Slovenian Youth



**Maja Drobne**  
**Tomaž Deželan**  
**Karolina Babič**

# European programmes: Key milestones

**1987–1989:** Youth for Europe I

**1990–1994:** Youth for Europe II

**1995–1999:** Youth for Europe III

**1997–1999:** European Voluntary Service (pilot)

**2000–2006:** Youth Community Action Programme

**2001:** Eurodesk (free European Commission information service)

**2002–:** SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre

**2007–2013:** Youth in Action Programme

**2013–2021:** Erasmus+: Youth in Action

**2018–2021, 2021–2027:** European Solidarity Corps<sup>1</sup>

**2021–2027:** Erasmus+: Youth

<sup>1</sup> This text focuses on the 2021–2023 period when discussing the Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

## European programmes and the youth field

In common with many fields of work in Slovenia, the youth field is the beneficiary of European funding, which means that it receives funds from European programmes for its operations and development, in addition to those awarded from central government and municipal budgets. The current EU funding programmes, framed by the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 and the NextGenerationEU recovery facility, address the funding of the youth field under Heading 2 ('Cohesion and values', subheading 'Investing in people, social cohesion and values'), with the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programmes acting as the vehicles of delivery. Under that subheading, the youth field is also partly addressed through the European Social Fund+ (ESF+), but this is mainly in relation to those elements relevant to the strengthening of employment opportunities for young people. Erasmus+ is chiefly designed to provide support to the educational, professional and personal development of individuals in education, training, youth and sport, while the ESC is aimed at young people wishing to volunteer to help the disadvantaged, provide humanitarian aid, and contribute to health and environmental action (European Commission, n.d.). Prior to the 2021–2027 period, these elements were covered by other (similar) programmes.

This chapter offers a series of reflections on the key European programmes that have supported (and continue to support) the youth sector in Slovenia. We also assess the consequences that such extensive funding has in comparison with the central government funds available to the sector.

## Genealogy of European youth programmes in Slovenia

Slovenia was relatively late in becoming involved in the EU's Youth for Europe III programme (1995–1999). Preparations had been under way since 1997, but were held up by Italy's refusal to ratify Slovenia's Association Agreement. It eventually joined on 1 May 1999 — the last of the 2004 intake to do so. In 2000 Slovenia joined the Youth Community Action Programme (2000–2006), which merged the Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service (EVS) programmes. The Youth in Action programme was then introduced in 2007. In that year, MOVIT, the Institute for the Development of Youth Mobility and Slovenia's national agency, allocated funds of EUR 2,744,000 to the delivery of (mainly) international projects. These funds represented the largest single source of public support for the operation and development of youth work in Slovenia (Škulj, 2016). Discussing the differences between programmes (interview, 16 April 2021),<sup>2</sup> Škulj highlighted the fact that 'the Youth for Europe programme gave much greater support to the idea of European integration' and that 'the programmes focused on multilateral projects that had to have four or more partners'. The Youth for Europe programme was, in Škulj's words (ibid.), 'an instrument for achieving the Maastricht Treaty, as the European political arena was aware that it needed people's support — that it was vital to bring the younger generations of France and Germany closer together in order to unite Europe in an emotional sense.'

Slovenia took part in the Youth Community Action Programme between 2000 and 2006, a period marked by the country's entry into the EU. Full membership led to a significant increase in the funds available to it through the programme — indeed, they doubled overnight. This was followed by the Youth in Action programme, which was launched in 2007. In his short review of the seven years of that programme, Janez

<sup>2</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

Škulj, head of MOVIT at the time, argued that the developments of 2007 to 2013 were a natural continuation of the events that had taken place since the founding of MOVIT in 1997 (Škulj, 2014):

*Perhaps the best way to describe the beginnings [of MOVIT] is that we were going around in 1999 asking organisations to meet the challenge of taking part in youth exchanges. Fifteen years on we get so many youth exchange project applications that we are unable to accept more than half of them. International youth work and learning mobility in youth work have now finally acquired a recognised position among those active in the youth work field in Slovenia.*

The Youth in Action programme (2007–2013) continued and built upon previous European Commission youth programmes, with a particular emphasis on encouraging young people to take part in democratic life. Initiatives for young people with fewer opportunities came to the fore for the first time. To be a young person with fewer opportunities is the answer to the question of who, within a specific local environment, has the fewest employment opportunities, who has the fewest opportunities for (political) participation in their communities, and who has the fewest opportunities to acquire experiences elsewhere in Europe. The programme was based on an understanding that the youth population had expanded over the previous ten years, which necessitated a broadening of the range of ages eligible to join the programme (15–28 or, in some cases, 13–30). Based on new findings, the programme planned new actions and expanded those already in place. The clear expectation was that projects that wished to obtain funding had to pursue and meet the programme's objectives. These were defined in a narrower sense than had been the case up to then. The programme sought to increase the effectiveness of projects, which had to be relevant to the environment and capable of being disseminated widely, and raise the number of young people active within the programme (Pečjak, 2006). The programme's aims complemented the purpose and aims that the European Commission wished to achieve in other areas, particularly education, knowledge, vocational training, lifelong learning, culture and sport. The general objectives were: to promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular; to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, with a focus on fostering social cohesion in the European Union; to nurture mutual understanding between young people in different countries; to help develop the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field; and to promote European cooperation in the youth field. These general objectives were implemented at project level, with due consideration given, as the Youth in Action Programme Guide sets out, to the continuing priorities of European citizenship, participation of young people, cultural diversity and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities (European Commission, 2008).

The Youth in Action programme took a new approach based on simplicity, clarity, openness, cohesion and flexibility. It enabled the results of the programme to be integrated and monitored in a more user-friendly and efficient way by the European Commission (in collaboration with Member States). It contained five actions: the Youth for Europe action, which was aimed at developing youth mobility, exchanges and initiatives by individuals and groups via projects to promote participation in democratic life; the European Voluntary Service action, which sought to develop solidarity and

tolerance, active citizenship and mutual understanding between people by involving young people volunteers in non-profit, unpaid activities that benefited the wider community in which they lived; the Youth in the World action, which enabled cooperation with neighbouring (partner) countries of the EU and the rest of the world; the Youth Support Systems action, which fostered cooperation between youth organisations at European level, the European Youth Forum and other organisations to in order to stimulate quality and innovation, promote information activities and incorporate regional and local partners, etc.; and the Support for European Cooperation in the Youth Field action, which supported European cooperation in youth policy and activities to bring about better knowledge of the youth field by encouraging the sharing of good practices at all levels and the participation of policymakers, officials and youth organisations, all with the aim of getting to know and understand young people better and based on a Structured Dialogue between policymakers and young people (European Commission, 2017).

Erasmus+: Youth in Action was the youth-centred part of the Erasmus+ programme. Covering education, training, youth and sport for the period between 2014 and 2020, it was designed to strengthen young people's competencies and employability, and modernise and develop education, training and youth work. The Erasmus+ programme encouraged the youth sector to organise international learning mobility for young people aged between 13 and 30 that offered opportunities for non-formal education within the youth work context. It also sought to provide youth workers with the skills that would better equip them to organise non-formal learning in youth work activities, and to include young people in dialogue with those responsible for youth policy at local, national, European or international level. The specific objectives of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme were: to improve the level of key competencies and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, as well as to promote participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity, in particular through increased learning mobility opportunities for young people, those active in youth work or youth organisations and youth leaders, and through strengthened links between the youth field and the labour market; to foster quality improvements in youth work, in particular through enhanced cooperation between organisations in the youth field and/or other stakeholders; to complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level and support the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policy as well as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, in particular through enhanced policy cooperation, better use of EU transparency and recognition tools and the dissemination of good practices; and to enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the capacity of youth workers and organisations in their support for young people in complementarity with the EU's external action, in particular through the promotion of mobility and cooperation between stakeholders from Programme and Partner Countries and international organisations (European Commission, 2020).

The programme was divided into three key actions: the learning mobility of individuals (Youth Exchanges and Mobility of Youth Workers); cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (Strategic Partnerships in the field of youth); and support for policy reform (Youth Dialogue). The more prominent features of the programme included the promotion of international cooperation and the learning of foreign languages, equality and social inclusion, and the development of specific



fields through exchange of the good practices, learning materials and methods produced by the projects.

EVS volunteering projects were included in this action until 2018 and are now part of the European Solidarity Corps programme (European Commission, 2020). Both programmes together received a total of 2,442 project applications requesting grants totalling EUR 67,393,275 in 2014–2020. In that period, grants of EUR 22,797,965 were awarded to 1,006 projects (both programmes) via MOVIT. A total of 2,124 projects applied to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, with a total grant request of EUR 61,792,480. Forty-three per cent of projects were successful (912 projects, 264 different organisations, 36,913 participants, grants totalling EUR 19,167,134 awarded), 29% of participants (10,830) were young people with fewer opportunities and 3% (930) were young people with special needs. The ESC programme saw 318 applications in 2018–2020 (grants totalling EUR 5,600,795 requested). MOVIT approved 180 projects and awarded them grants totalling EUR 3,630,831 — a success rate of 57%. Funds were received by 94 different organisations and 1,179 participants, 38% (449) of whom were young people with fewer opportunities and 2% (24) young people with special needs (MOVIT, 2021).

Erasmus+: Youth is the most recent programme. As it is still in its early stages, an evaluation has so far been carried out for 2021–2023 only. It shows that KA152 (Youth Exchanges) has received the highest level of interest: 246 applications, 120 approved (49%), which was the highest number of approvals of all actions in this period. The fewest number of applications in this period was received for KA155 (DiscoverEU Inclusion): three applications received and approved, all in 2023. No applications were received in 2022, and the action was not offered in 2021. Forty-six per cent of all applications (305 of 666) were approved in 2020–2023. The lowest success rate, 21%, was in KA210 (Small-Scale Partnerships). Overall, the success rate for applications to KA2 is low, at around a quarter. There was a significant increase in the level of funding in 2021–2023, with the highest amount made available in 2023 (EUR 5,293,205). Lump sums have been introduced into KA2 in the most recent period: EUR 30,000 or 60,000 per small-scale project, and EUR 120,000, 250,000 or 400,000 per large project. A total of 305 projects were approved in 2021–2023 (255 KA1 and 50 KA2), to a total value of EUR 14,516,118 (Deželan, Babič and Vombergar, 2024).

Replacing the EVS programme, the ESC has been in place for the two most recent periods. A total of 361 ESC projects were carried out in Slovenia between 2018 and 2023; funds totalling EUR 470,000 were awarded in the first year of the programme (2018) and EUR 1.68 million in 2023. Competition for funds from this programme has increased sharply as time has gone on. In 2022, for example, even highly rated projects saw a significant reduction in the funds available, which forced them to cut back on project content (Deželan, 2023).

Alongside the Erasmus and ESC programmes, the European Social Fund (ESF) is another mechanism that has created a large number of opportunities and challenges for the youth sector. Where it was more focused on developing human resources and building capacity in the first Financial Perspective 2007–2013, in the second (2014–2020) it steered the sector towards resolving the issue of unemployment — which is hardly the primary task of the youth sector. It has become apparent that some practices remain relevant and have brought added value, while others have created bureaucratic challenges — a situation that has still not fundamentally changed.

### Actions common to all programmes

Youth exchanges and youth worker mobility, as well as support for policy reform, are the main actions common to all programmes. All actions have sought to give effect to the Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010–2018) (Council of the European Union, 2009) and its previous instruments, such as the European Commission White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth (European Commission, 2001) and the European Youth Pact (2005). All of these are focused on achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs (Zavod MOVIT, 2019; Cink, 2019, 18–22), one of the tools for which is the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme. Structured Dialogue has become a recognised instrument of consultation with young people, and has also fed into the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027), which continues to seek to meet youth policy objectives at Union and Member State level through the new Erasmus+ programme. The only action to have been added to the programme since 2013 is Strategic Partnerships, which sets out to systematically develop and strengthen the competencies of the sector and improve its quality (Zavod MOVIT, 2019).

Youth exchanges are a tool of non-formal learning in youth work that enables groups of young people from different countries to spend between five and 21 days together exploring topics of mutual interest, develop their skills, become aware of socially relevant topics/thematic areas, discover new cultures, habits and lifestyles through peer-learning, and strengthen values such as solidarity, democracy and friendship. Each group of participants has a group/youth leader who provides assistance and support in project planning and implementation. As these projects require a large number of decisions to be taken, youth exchanges are an opportunity to learn about democratic cooperation and decision-making in society. Because of their relatively short duration, they are highly suitable for young people with fewer opportunities. At the end of the project and after the results have been disseminated, young people are encouraged to talk

to others, and to present their youth exchange achievements, experiences and stories to their local environment and beyond. This also helps to raise the profile of the learning outcomes of the activities, highlight the importance of non-formal learning in youth work in society at large, and increase the visibility of the Erasmus+ programme (Zavod MOVIT, n.d.).

The Mobility of Youth Workers action is aimed at fostering the professional development and consolidating the competencies of youth workers, and at strengthening the capacity of participating organisations to deliver youth work of a high standard. The activities of youth worker mobility projects can take several forms: study visits, on-site educational visits (job-shadowing) at organisations, professional seminars, training courses and so on. Projects should have a clear and demonstrable impact on the participating youth workers' day-to-day work with young people. Activities of this kind enable youth sector entities to create projects, in collaboration with international partners, that employ a range of activities aimed at addressing needs relating to the professional development of the participating organisations' staff. Those organisations are required to further disseminate the learning outcomes, including any materials and innovative methods and tools, in order to improve the quality of youth work and/or foster youth policy development and cooperation in the youth field. Activities must last between two days and two months, and the whole project between three and 24 months. A distinction is made between group activities (e.g. professional seminars on topics connected with youth work or youth policy, youth work training, seminars designed to find partners for project development, study visits), which usually feature a larger number of partners and participants, and individual activities (e.g. job-shadowing at a partner organisation), which generally involve two partners and one or two participants (European Commission, 2020).

Depending on the project objectives and composition, cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices can take the form of strategic partnerships for innovation or for the exchange of good practices. The

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first are aimed at developing innovations; the applicant therefore requests dedicated funds for the creation of intellectual outcomes and multiplier events at which the project outcomes are presented to the wider public. The second are aimed at the exchange and transfer of existing practices. The results of partner cooperation should make an important contribution to strengthening the competencies of youth sector actors, improving the quality of youth work, increasing the participation and active citizenship of young people, and promoting social enterprise among the young. Transnational Youth Initiatives also play an important role in this action. These are projects involving groups of young people that aim to foster and strengthen active citizenship and entrepreneurial spirit, including through social enterprise. One important component of Transnational Youth Initiatives is the pronounced learning dimension of projects involving young people, since they are the main driving force of projects. They achieve the stated learning objectives by following the learning pathways and performing practical tasks within project activities. Organisations may plan different national and international activities within the projects, which may last between six and 36 months (European Commission, 2014).

Support for Policy Reform is an action that promotes the active participation of young people in democratic life, and fosters debate around topics centred on the themes and priorities set by the EU Youth Strategy and its mechanisms of dialogue.<sup>3</sup> These events promote the active participation of young people in democratic life in Europe and their interaction with decision-makers, enabling them to obtain support for the organisation of national and international meetings, consultations, conferences and dialogues between young people and decision-makers locally, nationally and internationally. A concrete result of these events is that young people are able to make their voice heard (through the formulation of positions, proposals and recommendations) on how youth policies should be delivered in their local areas, their country and across Europe. The activities are led by young people themselves. Participants must be actively involved in all the stages of the project, from preparation to follow-up, while project implementation is based on non-formal learning principles and practices throughout. Projects may last between three and 24 months, and include several different national and international activities (European Commission, 2020).

Volunteering projects used to be part of the Erasmus programmes, but were later taken over by their own separate programme: the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). They offer young people the chance to take part in solidarity activities, which must help strengthen community by addressing important societal needs and challenges on the ground. This enables volunteers to acquire skills and competencies for their personal, educational, social, cultural, civic and professional development. Projects may be transnational or national in nature. The latter are aimed primarily at young people with fewer opportunities and must have a clear European dimension. Organisations may also carry out group volunteering projects; these cover a wide range of areas, such as environmental protection, climate change mitigation and greater social inclusion (European Commission, 2021).

Solidarity projects have returned to the programme after a period in which the 'youth initiatives' familiar from the Youth in Action programme had been abolished. A solidarity project is a group of solidarity activities planned, set, developed and carried out by young people themselves, most often in the applicant's local area or

<sup>3</sup> Since the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, Structured Dialogue has been referred to as Youth Dialogue.

region. However, they can also be expanded to national or international level in the case of Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs). Depending on the needs and planned objectives of the project, projects can last between two and 12 months. Their basic aim is to provide young people with the chance to express solidarity by taking responsibility and committing themselves to bringing positive change in their local community through the creation of new solutions and approaches to the challenges faced by the society and environment in which they live. A project should involve all members of the group, and address a clearly identified topic translated into concrete activities. Participation in a solidarity project is an important non-formal learning experience through which young people can boost their personal, educational, social and civic development, and improve their employment outcomes. Assistance may be provided by an instructor, chiefly in the learning support and mentoring processes, and is treated as an eligible cost (European Commission, 2021).

In addition to funds for allocation to approved projects (for which applicants running the types of projects listed above may apply), funds are made available to all national agencies to enable them to organise their own support activities: training courses, seminars, study visits, conferences, etc. These are predominantly international (TCAs), aimed at applicants and beneficiaries, and designed to enhance the quality of programme implementation and enable the priorities and objectives of the programme to be achieved. TCAs in the youth field provide support for the high-quality delivery of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the mobilisation of as many target organisations and individuals as possible. They provide strategic support to the development of youth work in accordance with the specific youth-centred objectives of Erasmus+, and encourage organisations active in the youth field to work together at international level. As co-organisers, national agencies host or send interested participants to these activities (European Commission, 2020).

## **How have European funding mechanisms changed organisations?**

European programmes have had a considerable impact on organisations by providing funds and strengthening human resources. This is also evident from the development of the sector, the increase in the number of youth centres, youth organisations and other organisations for young people, the greater support for the youth sector at local level, the rise in quality, and the increase in the monitoring of the impact of activities, such as the introduction of the Logbook system, the Mladim website and other similar mechanisms.

Katarina Nučič, former director of Trbovlje youth centre, believes that the programmes have:

*[moved] towards professionalism, strategic thinking and a development-focused mindset. These programmes are what they are and, to be competitive in these things, you have to take a very close look at where you are in the local environment, what your organisation needs in that environment, the target groups, and where you want to be heading in the future. The definite upside to all this is that you are no longer doing things in a totally ad hoc way (interview, 15 April 2021).*

She recalls how things were at the very beginning:

*Everything was very different in 2005, when we had our first European experience. Looking back, when we were doing one exchange a year, our approach was different to what it was subsequently, when we were doing five a year. We did not get to those numbers because the organisation wanted to have that many exchanges but because word of these opportunities spread so quickly among young people that they wanted to get involved, not only as participants in specific activities but in the whole process. After that, it became possible to do it. Our team of three was unable to manage that many exchanges alongside the other programmes. This means that you have to do things by the book: young people come with an idea, you offer them support to realise that idea and write an application, which again has a particular impact. With support they can grasp these things and argue for them. We perhaps did not properly grasp the concept of active participation as well at the beginning as we did subsequently. Other organisations probably went through the same. Things change when you are in that environment, working with other organisations and starting to understand things differently. The change came about mainly in terms of active participation on the part of young people.*

Janez Škulj, founder of MOVIT, believes that:

*European programmes have done most to change the sector. From the outset, one of the important elements was the programme guide, where the methods, approaches and the things that every youth exchange was expected to achieve were written in Slovenian for the first time. It was very important at the beginning to develop a terminology. I see the biggest achievement as being that some youth work entities have incorporated international cooperation into all their operations, not just the occasional activity. This has transformed how their organisations work (interview, 16 April 2021).*

Sašo Kronegger refers to the environments and regions in which he sees most progress having been made (interview, 15 April 2021):

*Zasavje, Krško and Brežice have developed the most. The establishment of youth centres has meant that a certain group have remained there and found their first jobs. The peers of those who found work and who worked on programmes have also stayed.*

Uroš Skrinar adds the aspect of professionalisation (interview, 7 May 2021):

*Regardless of everything [...], a partial professionalisation of the youth sector has also taken place. Whatever form this takes, there are quite a few actors in the sector, organisations as well as individuals, who we know to be actors in the youth sector. These actors have also acquired the knowledge they have through investment, for example, in the pool of trainers that has developed in the last few years. These trainers are highly regarded and very welcome on the wider European scene.*

The evaluation of the 2017–2023 period conducted by Deželan, Babič and Vombregar (2024) also highlights the impact on organisations, chiefly those relating to process (networking, strengthening of staff competencies, links with other organisations, exchange of practices and tools, etc.).

## **Impact of programmes on the Slovenian youth sector and the local (national) reality**

The impacts of European programmes on the youth sector in Slovenia are many and varied, as Uroš Skrinar, current MOVIT director, confirmed in an interview on 7 May 2021:

*The [impacts] that we noted in the RAY network and that have occurred with the help of the University of Ljubljana are now proven – for the individual. Mainly from the aspect of interculturality, teamwork skills and an awareness of the importance of non-formal education, right up to the organisational development of organisations. Because they have had to establish systems and structures in response to project implementation requirements, these organisations have set up internal systems and structures. There are a lot of them. I believe that the impact on the individual is clear.*

Barbara Zupan (interview, 21 April 2021) believes that:

*... the most obvious impacts are produced by international youth work. Programmes have resulted in new opportunities, with youth exchanges and voluntary work having the greatest effect. That is where the impact on individuals and organisations is more evident, and it has been really considerable on organisations. I see the second major impact on the development of non-formal education in Slovenia. In local communities, non-formal education has been equated almost entirely with youth work, in other communities a little less so. Strong players logically means greater development.*

However, in the same interview she concludes that:

*The impact is weakest at the Office for Youth [...]. Organisations have not developed to the extent that we would wish for. This is probably also due to a lack of funding aimed directly at supporting youth work. Funds (mainly cohesion funds) have also been allocated indirectly to the development of youth work, but in the first instance to increasing young people's ability to enhance their employment prospects. Consequently, you then also see how youth work has managed to develop, as this issue is being addressed using youth work methods. The sector also often addresses other areas and numerous other topics using those methods. The sector is very often the first to address some of the broader problems facing society. With the methods employed, you can address a great many problems and reach other age groups more easily.*

The interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme drawn up by Tomaž Deželan in 2017 also contains a wealth of interesting data at several levels. Of the topics addressed in the projects, non-formal and informal education/learning came top with 66.1%, followed by cultural diversity (56.7%), young people and youth work (53.3%), personal development (50.6%), and education, training and learning (42.2%). The topics that drew the least interest within projects were youth policy development

(6.7%), EU policies or structures (11.1%) and youth policy (11.7%). The topic most commonly addressed in Youth Exchange (Key Action 1) projects in 2016 was creativity and culture (68%), followed by participation of young people and youth work (49%), inclusion and equity (45%) and EU citizenship (39%). Participation, youth work, and creativity and culture were also the most common topics addressed in EVS (Key Action 1) projects, while participation and youth work (16%) and international cooperation, international relations and development cooperation (8%) were the two most popular topics in Mobility of Youth Workers (Key Action 1) projects (Deželan, 2017).

Just under three-quarters (74.7%) of organisations believe that Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its predecessor programmes have made a considerable or very considerable contribution to improving the quality of youth work (31.5% very considerable, 43.2% considerable); only 0.5% felt that Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its predecessor programmes had made only a very limited contribution (Deželan, 2017). The evaluation of the Erasmus+: Youth 2017–2023 programme (Deželan, Babič and Vomberger, 2024) also looks at the parameters of the impact of the programme on individuals, organisations and the community, and finds that the impact on project participants is greatest when participants are actively involved in all phases of a project and a project employs non-formal methods of work tailored to young people. The evaluation also shows that young people gain lifelong learning skills during projects, while the effects on organisations are predominantly process-related (networking, strengthening of staff competencies, links with other organisations, exchange of practices, etc.). Indeed, it is more difficult to secure a concrete, long-term impact on organisations, as this would require a higher level of permanent resources to ensure that the project results are sustained over the longer term. As far as community impact is concerned, local communities welcome projects and their international dimensions, and are interested in similar projects in the future. The evaluation of the ESC 2018–2023 (Deželan, 2023) identifies similar effects on the part of the solidarity and volunteering programme, finding that the programme has a tangible impact at the individual, organisational and community levels, and is a manifestation of the European Youth Goals. The programme has had a major impact on organisational changes and on the entire ecosystem in the fields of youth, volunteering, welfare and education. The impacts can also be felt locally, particularly in smaller and more remote communities.

### **Impact of projects financed by the European Social Fund**

The final report evaluating the success of measures for the permanent inclusion of young people in the labour market (Deloitte Slovenija, 2019) also addresses the impact on the youth sector of the Operational Programme for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy 2014–2020. With the aim of reducing youth unemployment, Slovenia allocated a portion of ESF resources within the Operational Programme to operations under Priority Axis 8 (Promoting employment and supporting transnational labour mobility), Priority Investment 8.2 (Sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, especially those who are not employed and are not educated or trained, including young people exposed to social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee), and Specific Objective 8.2.1 (Reduction of youth unemployment).

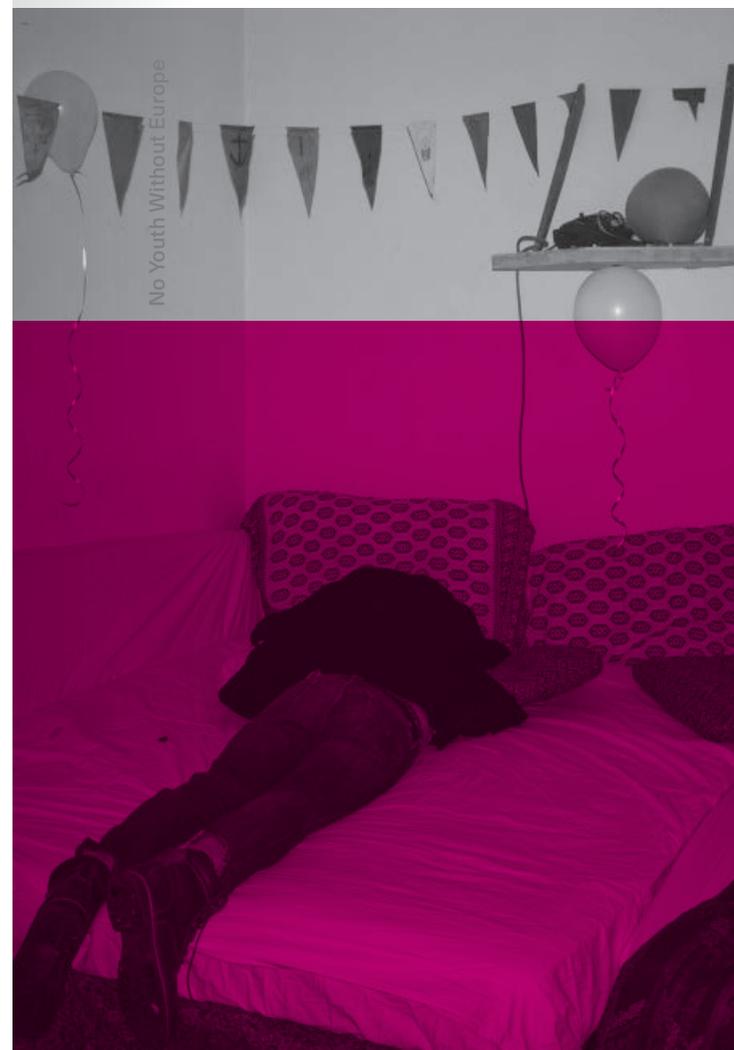
The aim of the operations was to put cooperation and employment mechanisms in place to enable young people aged between 15 and 29 to undertake practical work experience and work-based training at educational institutions and youth sector

organisations, when such work experience was a mandatory part of a professional qualification. The operations also fostered the development of active citizenship among young people through the delivery of innovative projects that enhanced their employment prospects and helped them develop the appropriate skills (target group: young first-time jobseekers and young unemployed people aged between 15 and 29). In addition to increasing employment opportunities for young people, the measure also aimed to introduce a more varied set of approaches to youth employment via youth work, and to strengthen the youth sector generally by training organisations to address and resolve the issue of youth unemployment. The young people involved also had the opportunity to obtain the experience necessary for obtaining the youth worker national vocational qualification, and to acquire civic and life skills.

Among other things, participation in the action has enabled organisations to employ people who were previously involved as volunteers. There are positive effects as well in the reduction in other employees' workload and better organisation of work. Beneficiary organisations have, in the main, promoted innovative forms of youth work mainly by employing innovative approaches to young people, innovative content and new methods of work. Organisations have identified the swifter and easier employment of young people as the main impact of innovative forms of youth work.

Participants have increased their self-confidence and communicational skills, and are engaging in more direct and personal contact with employers. Organisations have developed a large number of innovative products, such as new training models at youth centres, handbooks for young jobseekers and enterprise promotion. Forty per cent of organisations in the study believed that participation in the project had enabled them to gain the necessary knowledge and experience to address and resolve the issue of youth unemployment, highlighting a better understanding of young people and their position on the labour market and the use of new forms of knowledge transfer, which include innovative approaches and intergenerational cooperation (Deloitte Slovenija, 2019).

However, it is important to note that the situation is not without its drawbacks. Maja Hostnik, director of the MaMa Network, had this to say about the ESF projects that MaMa had carried out (interview, 19 May 2021):



*European programmes are very bureaucratic and restrictive. This means that project managers and assistants are hampered when trying to deal with the content they should be dealing with because there's so much administration behind it. So I believe that things are not moving in the right direction and that there is a lack of coherence overall. Yes, it's nice to hear that 350 young people were involved in a project and 5,000 across the youth sector as a whole. But the problem with European projects, as well as with the organisations that take part in them, is that they are forced into new topics and do not actually address young people who are in the youth sector and have an affinity with it but, rather, young people who are unfamiliar with the sector. The problem arises because European Social Fund programmes have changed their focus significantly. It's no longer about developing the youth sector but merely about finding young people and chasing numbers.*

## **Developmental opportunities of programmes and their future impact**

The Erasmus+ programme has more or less retained its previous structure in the new financial perspective, with the exception of the shifting of Key Action 3 to Key Action 1 and the renaming of the action, from Support for Policy Reform to Youth Participation Activities.<sup>4</sup> Some new elements have been introduced into the Erasmus+ priorities. Inclusion and diversity remains the most important one, followed by digital transition (a particular consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic), while active participation and participation in democratic life also retain their importance. The environment and the fight against climate change have been added as an important horizontal priority (Zavod MOVIT, 2021). In the national context, MOVIT prioritises social inclusion and active European citizenship, with a particular focus on the active participation of young people. It also focuses on those policy priorities that link the implementation of EU programmes with the EU Youth Strategy (EUYS) and the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA). The quality of youth work remains a priority and an objective pursued by the national agency in projects.

In the last 30 years or so, youth programmes have significantly changed the arena in which young people are able to acquire skills and experience. However, it remains the case that the amount of funding available for the youth field in the overall central government budget is not sufficient to support the programmes that young people need for their development, particularly when it comes to youth organisations and organisations for young people. Slovenia's membership of the EU has led to considerable changes to the opportunities enjoyed by the youth sector. It has created a space not just for greater funding opportunities, but also and above all for capacity-building and new methodologies. This expansion of opportunity has enhanced the quality of youth work. Young people have been able to gain experience abroad and acquire skills that are difficult to acquire solely in the local and national context, particularly linguistic and intercultural competencies, and the ability to work in groups and think critically.

While the youth sector has developed predominantly with the help of European funds, the disproportionately strong financing of the youth sector by the EU compared to the financing available from domestic sources means a greater emphasis on EU priorities at the expense of national youth development priorities. We have seen how

<sup>4</sup> While KA3 remains in place at EU level, some of the content of the action has been transferred to KA1 (Youth Participation Activities) at national level. Slovenia is not implementing the other content of KA3 in the new 2021–2027 programme.

the emphases and priorities introduced by Erasmus youth programmes and the ESF have changed over the years. The Slovenian youth sector has been obliged to follow these changes even when the national and/or local needs have differed, as has been the case at certain times. An example of this is the 2014–2020 financing period, which was planned in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and encouraged the youth sector to focus on youth employment. This distracted many youth organisations from their primary missions, transforming them into a sort of employment support service for young people.

In the initial period there was a requirement to pursue the priorities of the Youth for Europe programme, which focused chiefly on European integration and the creation of an emotional community built on the idea of EU identity. The programme that followed, Erasmus+: Youth in Action, was already more focused, in operational terms, on project effectiveness and on more specific objectives in the fields of education, vocational training, lifelong learning, and efforts to promote active citizenship in general (and European citizenship in particular) among the young. Since the elements of the 2014–2020 programme were planned in response to the financial crisis, they focused on strengthening young people's competencies and employment prospects, and on modernising and developing education, training and youth work. Similarly, the ESF priorities in 2014–2020 and 2021–2017 focused on strengthening skills to improve employment outcomes and help young people develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Strategic Partnerships, which set out to systematically develop and strengthen the competencies of the sector and improve its quality, are perhaps the most important new component to have been added to the programme since 2013. The current European framework is heavily invested in the priorities of the green and digital transitions.

The Slovenian youth sector has therefore had the opportunity to access considerable funds for development, but in the context of changing priorities, which shifted from European cohesion and the consolidation of young people's civic and life skills to youth employment outcomes and enterprise, before finally coming to rest on the current focus on digital transformation and sustainable development. While these common European priorities present a reasonable set of strategic starting points, they can also be a limiting factor, mainly because of an absence of clear national and local priorities. They compel the Slovenian youth sector to move hither and thither in response to new European priorities and funding conditions as they arise.

The evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme carried out by Deželan, Babič and Vombergar in 2024 points out that the success in addressing the horizontal priorities has been higher in relation to inclusion and diversity and participation in democratic life than in priorities linked to the green and digital transitions. It also highlights the fact that the programme is achieving high participation rates among young people with fewer opportunities, although the definition of that group in the programme depends very much on context. It shows that the distribution of funds changes significantly from action to action over time, but that these changes are not steered by strategy (and especially not when it comes to national priorities), and that while total funding has grown since 2020, it is difficult to assess whether this has had a correspondingly significant impact. Along with this, there are too few funds for and an insufficient focus on mentoring for young people. Mentoring and guidance are becoming increasingly important for young people, particularly given the rise in mental health, psychological and personal problems among this age group. Put simply, the resources available for coordinators and mentors within organisations, as well as for external providers, are

too low. There is a disproportionate ratio between the funds managed by the Office for Youth and Erasmus+ funds managed by the national agency; as a result, Erasmus+ explicitly determines public policy in the youth field instead of complementing it, while national priorities are not adequately inserted into the project application conditions, even though the Erasmus+ programme allows them to be so. This means that a certain set of new organisations ('newcomers') are lost to the application process, as is content specifically relevant to local and national contexts. As a consequence, the national agency's impact on public youth policy exceeds that of its powers – it is, after all, a private implementing organisation and not a central government authority with powers to develop youth policy.

Another of the evaluation's more significant findings is that organisations frequently create a core activity via Erasmus+ projects alone. Seldom are they sufficiently independent, in terms of funding from other sources, to use Erasmus+ to upgrade that core activity. Tomaž Deželan's evaluation of the ESC programme (2023) also finds that while the ESC has led to positive changes at organisational, personal and local community levels, it has an insufficiently strong connection with national volunteering and youth priorities, and the funds available for organisations and participants are so low as to jeopardise project delivery.

## Looking towards the future

In line with the key findings of the evaluations of the Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and European Social Fund programmes, we give a few recommendations and guidelines aimed at enhancing the deployment of European funds for the development of the youth sector in Slovenia.

The use of European funds must be aligned in a more logical and comprehensive way with the national priorities set out in the national youth strategy. New youth-centred strategies and programmes should set out national priorities, dictated by the needs of end-users, that adequately complement European programmes. In the absence of this, European horizontal priorities can act as a disincentive.

The term 'innovation', which frequently appears as a precondition in project application calls, must be defined more clearly so as to cover not merely new content, but the upgrading (in quality terms) and/or ongoing delivery of successful older programmes. This will prevent applicants from abandoning their strategic focus in favour of meeting the requirements of project calls.

Attention and resources must be focused on systematic, high-quality mentoring and expert advice to the young people involved, particularly those suffering from mental health difficulties or personal and psychological distress.

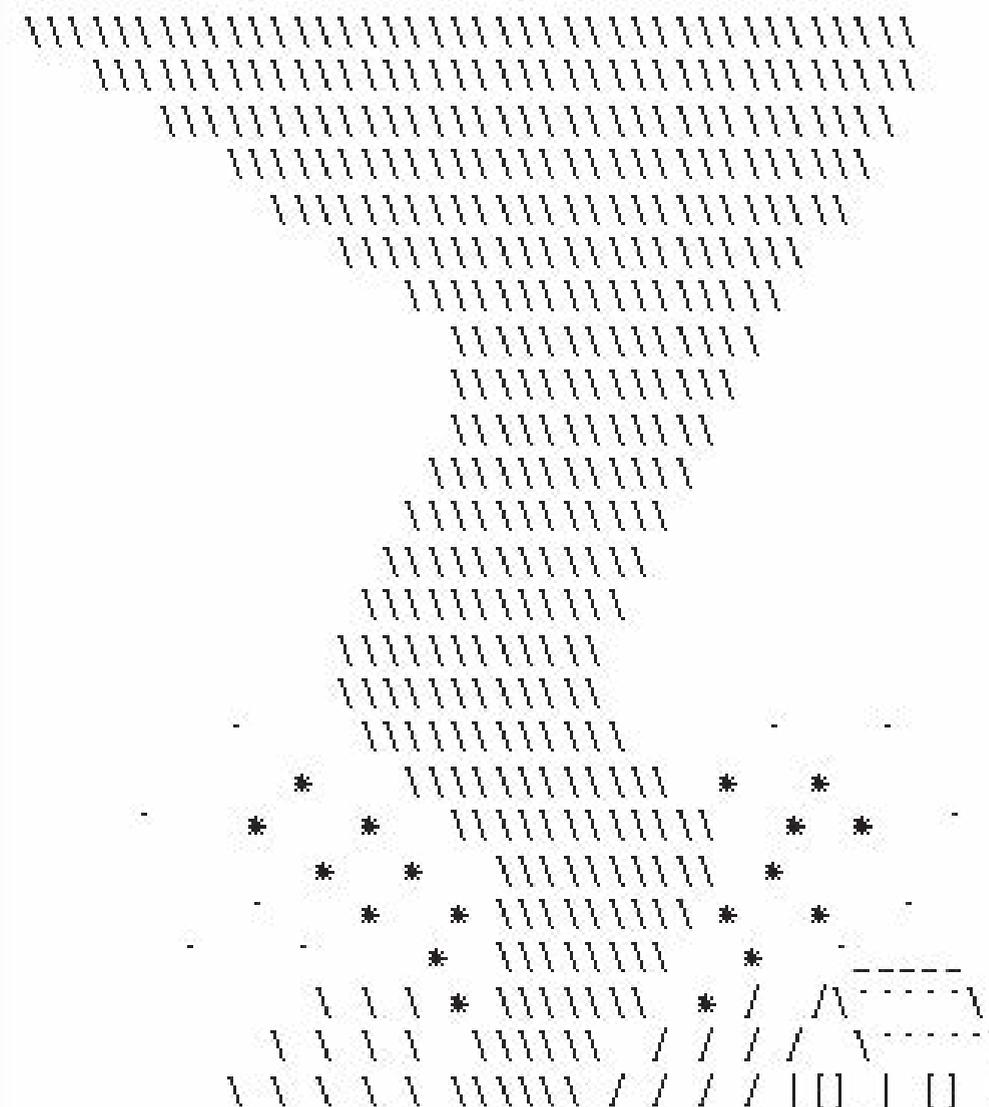
As far as the impact of European funds on organisations themselves is concerned, there needs to be a better understanding of the links between the areas of operation of organisations based on the needs of direct users and the broader horizontal priorities of the programmes. The programmes themselves also need to be steered in this direction.

It is vitally important that the volume and continuity of funding of the day-to-day operations of youth organisations be increased and stabilised so that those organisations can develop their core activities independently of project-funding sources. Those activities should then be upgraded and supplemented in line with European priorities and objectives with the help of European funds. Of course, this is not the task of European programmes (or not the only one); but it is important for those

programmes to understand and adequately address this national gap.

All the positive and negative effects of European programmes on the youth field need to be monitored, independently and at a healthy distance. Only in this way, without excessive cheerleading or criticism, can we properly identify and build upon all the positive achievements of programmes – and remove the weaknesses, which certainly do exist, effectively and transparently.

No Youth Without Europe



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## Chapter 5

# The Central Importance of the Mladina Series

Researching Youth and Young People in Slovenia

Tomaž Deželan  
Katja Nacevski  
Marko Majce

# Key milestones in the development of Youth research in Slovenia:

**1986:** Mladina '85

**1995:** Mladina '93

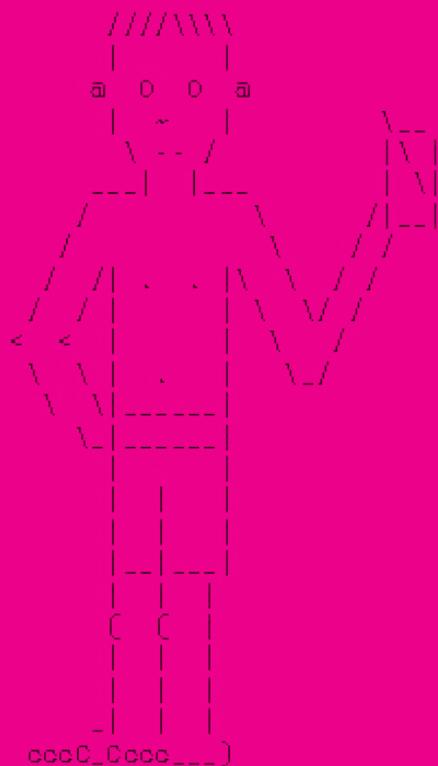
**2000:** Mladina '98

**2002:** Mladina 2000

**2011:** Mladina 2010

**2014:** Slovenska Mladina 2013

**2021:** Mladina 2020



The Central Importance of the Mladina Series

Young people are defined as a social group in a range of different ways, but the starting point for many of the definitions is what they are not. Comparisons are drawn with other groups, such as children and adults, with the aim of drawing out the differences between them. According to Mirjana Ule and Vlado Miheljak, young people are 'a generational group situated between childhood and adulthood, characterised by the creation of their own world, one that adults are unable to steer and control in their own way' (Ule and Miheljak, 1995), while the Council of Europe's framework definition refers to young people as individuals aged between 15 and 29 — which means that there have been two full generations of young people in the three and a half decades since Slovenia became an independent country. The Slovenian Office for Youth (Urad RS za mladino) and the other institutions that have developed since independence monitor this age group and the population changes within it, usually in the form of studies supported by research organisations at home and abroad.

Numerous studies have set out to describe Slovenian youth, with the earliest of them being produced when the country was still part of Yugoslavia. The research originally took the form of monographs, most notably *Mladina in ideologija* (Youth and Ideology, Ule (1988)),<sup>1</sup> *Prihodnost mladine* (The Future of Young People, Ule and Miheljak (1995)), *Predah za študentsko mladino* (Breathing Space for Slovenian Youth, ed. Ule (1996)), *Mladina v devetdesetih: Analiza stanja v Sloveniji* (Young People in the 1990s: An Analysis of the Situation in Slovenia, Ule (1996)), *Prosti čas mladih v Ljubljani* (Young People's Leisure Time in Ljubljana, Ule and Renar (1998)) and *Socialna ranljivost mladih* (The Social Vulnerability of Young People, ed. Ule (2000)). These have since been followed by systematic research studies of young people mainly centred around the 'Mladina' (Youth) series: Mladina 2000 (Miheljak, 2002), Mladina 2010 (Lavrič et al., 2011), Slovenska Mladina 2013 (Flere et al., 2014) and Mladina 2020 (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021).

## Slovenian youth research in the last century

An extensive research study, *Položaj, svest i ponašanje mlade generacije Jugoslavije* (Vrcan, 1986), was produced by CIDID Beograd and IDIS Zagreb in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Of the approximately 6,500 young people included in the standardised sample, just over 500 were from Slovenia (Ule and Vrcan, 1986). This prompted Slovenian researchers to produce their own separate study, which focused exclusively on young people in Slovenia and had its own national funding sources. The research was conducted in 1985 and 1986 at the Institute of Criminology the Ljubljana Faculty of Law (Ule, 1988) and produced two studies: a quantitative study of the values and lifestyles of young people in Slovenia, and a qualitative study that examined the discussions around youth that had been published in the *Mladina* and *Tribuna* journals between 1944 and 1985. In-depth interviews were also held with representatives of the social movements of the time.

In the literature, the title 'Mladina '85' is used to refer to both studies. In her *Mladina in ideologija* (Youth and Ideology, 1988), Mirjana Ule drew on their findings, focusing on topics such as the concept of youth through history, youth as an ideological

<sup>1</sup> A large part of this monograph was given over to a discussion of the Mladina '85 study, which was the first in the ongoing 'Mladina' series.

<sup>2</sup> Centar za istraživačku, dokumentacionu in izdavačku djelatnost predsjedništva konferencije SSOJ (CIDID, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publishing Activities of the Presidency of the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia); Institut za istraživanja Sveučilišta v Zagrebu (IDIS, Institute of Research at the University of Zagreb).

construct, youth and discipline, images of contemporary Slovenian youth and their values, young people's approaches to and attitudes towards politics, and the 'modernisation' of youth. She also touched on the themes of youth subcultures, individualism among the young and attitudes towards the Relay of Youth,<sup>3</sup> all of which served to point up the differences between young people in Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. The Slovenian respondents showed less desire to be involved in official social and political organisations than their Yugoslav peers, and indeed were less active within them. The more critical attitude towards the system displayed by Slovenian youth became known as 'alternativism'; this was the overarching term for a range of social practices that took place outside the scope of official politics. It was also evident in the differences in the way Slovenian young people and their peers from the other Yugoslav republics perceived social and youth-related problems. Slovenian youth were not so acutely affected by economic problems or by issues like unemployment; instead they focused on other problems of a more 'systemic' nature.

When Slovenia became independent in 1991, young people accounted for 22.47% of the population, down from 24.2% a decade earlier. This fall continued, to 22.24% in 1994. Mladina '93 (Ule, 1993), the first extensive post-independence study of young people in Slovenia, was related in concept to Mladina '85 (Ule and Vrcan, 1986) and the Shell Youth Study.<sup>4</sup> It was conducted by the youth studies section of the Centre for Social Psychology, which was based at the Social Sciences Research Institute at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FDV) in Ljubljana. The researchers focused on young people in secondary education in all 12 school regions. Three groups of four-year programmes and three groups of three-year programmes were included in the representative sample on a region-by-region basis, along with two groups of two-year programmes in each region. Only those areas that had all the courses and programmes specified in the sample were selected for the study. Owing to the special research interests that were also incorporated into the study, the sample was expanded to include Hungarian- and Italian-language schools, and schools in the Ljubljana region. The average age of the respondents was 17.7 years, with 70% identifying as being of Slovenian nationality. The survey was conducted at an inopportune time, coinciding as it did with the final days of the academic year and the school strike that took place in the last week of May and the first week of June 1993. For the purpose of the study, and because the level of response was less than ideal, two-year programmes were merged with three-year programmes. The sample sizes were nevertheless regarded as solid.

The authors (Ule and Miheljak, 1995) expressed the hope that this would signal the start of a systematic engagement with youth research of the kind seen in developed European countries (and indeed in other parts of the former Yugoslavia). In the first section, Mirjana Ule discussed concepts relating to youth and young people, placing them within a theoretical context; in the second, she reviewed and interpreted the results of the study, which she categorised into individual sets of concerns. She was interested in young people's attitudes towards growing up and adulthood,

<sup>3</sup> The Relay of Youth (*štafeta mladosti*) was a relay race held every year in socialist Yugoslavia in honour of Tito's birthday.

<sup>4</sup> The Shell Youth Studies, which are funded by Shell, the energy and petrochemical company, have been conducted in Germany since 1953. Designed to document the perceptions, feelings and expectations of young people, they are carried out by independent research institutions (Hertie School, 2019).

authoritarianism, traditionalism and nationalism, values and interests, social changes, and the problems they faced, particularly in relation to employment. In post-Second World War Yugoslav society, the role of young people was integrative and oriented towards productivity; in Slovenia as well, the image of young people was a positive one in the years following the war. From the end of the 1970s, however, research indicated that a more 'individualistic' path towards adulthood, i.e. one that was not essentially connected to affiliation with youth or other groups, was gaining ground (Ule and Miheljak, 1995: 76). The role of young people was also changing at this time. In the 1990s, Slovenian youth regarded moral virtue and personal characteristics as two of the values most important to them. Social characteristics, such as education and nationality, were seen as less important, and religious faith and political conviction even less so (Ule and Miheljak, 1995). In the third section, Vlado Miheljak focused on young people's attitudes towards politics and (the new) political practices, mainly at the level of opinions and values.

The Mladina '85 and Mladina '93 studies both showed that two-thirds of young people wanted to remain young for a while longer, or for as long as possible. In 1993 a relatively large proportion of young people were unable to determine how they felt about youth and adulthood, with around 10% still feeling that youth was merely the period of transition to adulthood, and one through which they wished to pass as quickly as possible (Ule and Miheljak, 1995).

*Mladina v devetdesetih: Analiza stanja v Sloveniji* (Young People in the 1990s: An Analysis of the Situation in Slovenia, Ule (1996)) was drafted for the Office for Youth and served as a national report on young people in Slovenia. Taking the form of a collection of papers by experts in the field, it arose as a response to the Council of Europe's work in the youth field; as such, it was the first to deal with young people as a single group of individuals aged between 15 and 29. Eleven papers discussed topics such as education and employment, values, political culture, health, lifestyles, standards and family status, and criminal activity.

The generation characterised as 'young' in the 1990s experienced its childhood and part of its adolescence at a time when socialism was collapsing. Although they had inherited constant economic growth and a rise in living standards from the older generations, they subsequently encountered unemployment, pressing environmental problems and the information revolution — something their parents had not known. In the first post-independence decade, young people mainly experienced a period of multiple transitions; this was in stark contrast to the decade before that, when they had fought for change and tried to prepare themselves for it. The study was carried out by researchers at the youth studies department of the Centre for Social Psychology at FDV. They relied on official statistical data, complemented by various public opinion surveys and studies previously carried out by the Institute for Social Sciences at FDV. The illustrative graphical presentations and tables of data, with accompanying analyses, were the first in a series of projects that the authors hoped would establish a consistent and growing structure of information on young people in Slovenia.

*Predah za študentsko mladino* (Breathing Space for Slovenian Youth, Ule et al. (1996)) referred to this study as Mladina '95. To some degree it complemented Mladina '93, as it surveyed young people who were three or four years older than those in the earlier study, although it restricted itself to students in post-secondary education (the 1993 study had focused on secondary school students). The first part of the monograph outlined the 'life world' of Slovenian youth, addressing topics such

as prolonging youth, identity in post-adolescence, the status of students as a youth elite, cultural modernisation, social circumstances, youth-related problems such as unemployment, attitudes towards adulthood, shifts in values, the triumvirate of authoritarianism, traditionalism and national affiliation, interest in religion, and interests in general. The second part looked at the family and young people's attitudes towards it, with a focus on topics such as the breakthroughs made in socialisation theory in the 1960s, citizenship post Marshall, 'Living Apart Together', generational and inter-generational peace, and family support, while the third part dealt with students' political potential through topics such as immanent radicalism, egalitarianism, trust, heritage, values, self-identification as left or right, positive or negative preferences, the values of the past, and public issues. The fourth and final part briefly examined discrimination based on sexual preference. The monograph compared the Mladina '95 data with the data from Mladina '93, from Slovenian public opinion surveys and from several international studies.

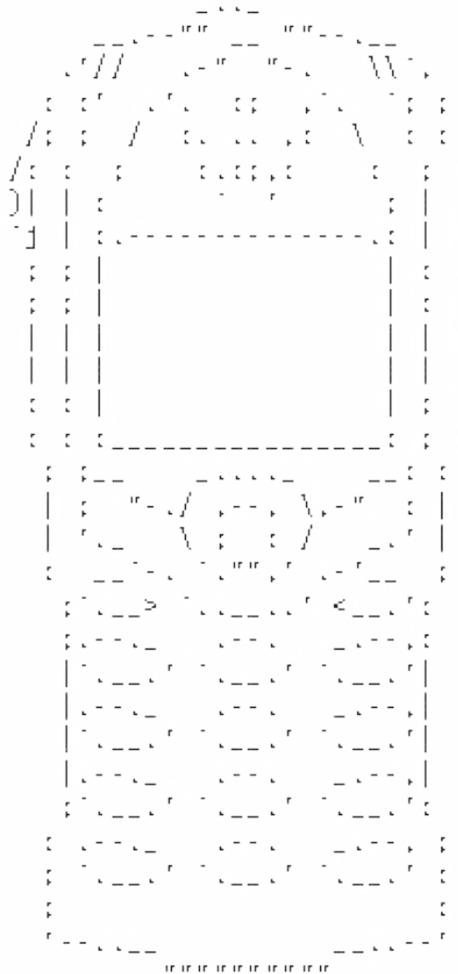
## Young people in the new millennium

### Mladina 2000

The research of the 1990s continued into the new millennium with the Mladina 2000 study (Miheljak, 2002), which aimed to provide a general overview of the younger generation in Slovenia. It targeted young people who had permanent residence in Slovenia and were aged between 16 and 29 on 20 October 2000.<sup>5</sup> Field research was conducted by the Centre for Social Psychology at FDV in the form of face-to-face interviews in the respondent's home, mainly by FDV students with no particular experience in conducting research surveys. A total of 1,262 interviews took place.

The study focused on political beliefs and on attitudes towards politics and democracy after ten years of transition. The researchers were also interested in young people's shopping habits, social contacts, general habits, activities and leisure, values, and attitudes towards school and parents, as well as their own assessments of the problems they faced. The findings were divided into the categories of family, education, work, politics and everyday life. In the family category, the research showed a decline in parental authority and, at the same time, a strengthening of the position of young people within the family. The average age at marriage had risen, as had the number of young people living alone or opting for cohabitation without marriage. Education had gained in importance, primarily as a gateway to employment and adulthood. More young

<sup>5</sup> Young people on military service, in hospital or serving sentences in correctional facilities were excluded from the study.



people were opting to remain in education for longer in order to gain more advanced educational qualifications, improve their employment prospects and/or delay their entry into an uncertain jobs market (Miheljak and Ule, 2001: 51). In the world of work and employment, new links were arising between education, employment (and unemployment) and lifelong learning. There had also been an increase in the importance of individual self-realisation through the practice of a profession.

Averaged across their responses, young people believed that 22.3 years was an appropriate age for first full-time employment, 23.79 years for leaving the parental home, 27.01 years for becoming a parent for the first time and 27.18 years for getting married. The study showed that some transitions had stopped following the traditional pattern — for example, marriage was increasingly coming after parenthood. The researchers found that the 'grand narratives' presented by ideological and faith systems (e.g. religion) appeared to be dead and that young people no longer built their values around them (Miheljak and Ule, 2001: 53). For them, health, true friendship, family life and global values (world peace, freedom of action and thought, environmental protection) were more important. At the same time, the survey indicated that levels of participation in conventional electoral politics were lower than before, and that young people were less inclined to trust political parties and leading politicians. They placed their greatest trust in parents, followed by siblings and friends. In everyday life, fashion, sex and communication, the behavioural patterns presented by the media and then introduced by peer groups tended to dominate young people's lives. The media revolution and new technologies were bringing about global changes and beginning to play an important roles in young people's lives. Their central problem was no longer 'Who am I?' but 'How should I appear to others?' The results of the study confirmed the basic hypothesis: that young people were changing their identity and assuming other social roles.

### Mladina 2010

The next important systematic research study of Slovenian youth appeared ten years later. Conducted by the Maribor Faculty of Arts in collaboration with the Interstat company, it expanded the age range slightly, to young people aged between 15 and 29 (previously 16 to 29), and was a conceptual and methodological continuation of the tradition of youth research in Slovenia. The main issues tackled by the study were: demographic changes and intergenerational cooperation; education and training; creativity; culture; leisure; the 'virtualisation' of daily life; employment and enterprise; a sustainable society; living and housing conditions; health and well-being; participation and social inclusion; voluntary activities; mobility; and globalisation. The sample was selected on the basis of data from the Slovenian central population register, and the target population was stratified into 12 statistical regions and six types of settlement. A total of 1,257 young people were surveyed (the sample had originally been set at 2,000, with a 60% response rate expected). Data was collected at face-to-face field interviews carried out between 27 June and 24 September 2010. The researchers also sought to draw longitudinal and international comparisons, particularly with other EU Member States (EU-27).

Mladina 2010 uncovered a strong trend of individualism among young people, where the prevailing belief seemed to be that everyone was responsible for themselves and for their own transition to adulthood. It found that the number of young people was falling in Slovenia — in fact, it had fallen by 11% in ten years. In comparison

with the EU-27, a higher proportion of young people in Slovenia were in education, although they tended to express dissatisfaction with the fact that the education system did not seem to be aligned with the needs of the labour market. The proportion of young people in full-time permanent employment had declined: in 2000 it was around 60% of 29-year-olds, but was down to 48% by 2010 (cf. Figure 1, Lavrič et al., 2011: 17).

The position of young people at the time of the study was defined by a combination of strong family support, prolonged participation in the education system and uncertainty on the jobs market. Other data sources showed that young people in Slovenia were among the last to leave the parental home compared to other EU-27 countries. Independence also had an impact on fertility, as a larger proportion of young people who lived away from the parental home had already had at least one child by age 29 compared to those who still lived with their parents. Opinions of political elites had deteriorated significantly, and young people had less of a sense of their own political influence. In fact, in comparison with the average for the EU-27, young people in Slovenia were significantly less interested in politics and political activism. That said, it is possible to see the period in which the study was produced as a time in which the potential for protest had strengthened, with greater engagement in individualised forms of political participation. As in the Mladina 2000 study, young people displayed a low level of trust in political structures, although they had become more active in voluntary work, mainly in the form of campaigns aimed at improving the position of young people.

The Mladina 2010 study identified an increase in computer use among young people, with 82% reporting that they used the internet (almost) every day. This was higher than the figure for both the EU-15 and the EU-27. However, young people were also devoting more time to sport and to cultural and artistic creation than they had been in 2000. Another interesting key finding was that young people remained as optimistic about their future as they had been 15 years earlier, and had not become more pessimistic (or less optimistic) about the future of society. It is not surprising that there was a heightened degree of dissatisfaction given the period in which the study was conducted: money was scarce, housing problems acute employment uncertain.

## Young people in the last 15 years

The Slovenian research community has continued to produce insights into the status and position of Slovenian youth over the last decade. Two larger studies worthy of mention here are *Slovenska Mladina 2013: Življenje v času deziluzij, tveganja in prekarnosti* (Slovenian Youth 2013: Living in Times of Disillusionment, Risk and Precarity, Flere et al., 2014) and the Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019 (Jusić, Lavrič and Tomanović, 2019). The most recent study, Mladina 2020 (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021), addressed young people as independent Slovenia moved into its fourth decade.

## Slovenska Mladina 2013

The Slovenska Mladina 2013 research study focused on young people aged between 16 and 27, basing its methodology on the Mladina 2010 study. It sought to obtain a comprehensive picture of how young people in Slovenia lived, but also to offer insights into the lives of young people in Croatia (IDIZ-FES Croatian 2012 Youth Study) and Kosovo (IDRA-FES Kosovo 2012 Youth Study). Data from Germany, specifically the 16th Shell Youth Study from 2011, was also used for comparison purposes. The data was collected between 29 May and 20 July 2013 by the Centre for Research into

Post-Yugoslav Societies at the University of Maribor and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, FES). The main areas of focus were determined by the FES research committee, which commissioned the study. They included: young people's living conditions and socio-economic situation; employment and mobility; education; leisure and lifestyle; media use; health, health-risk behaviours and lifestyle; family; anxieties and aspirations; trust and belonging; politics and democracy; and governance and development.

The target population was young people aged between 16 and 27 in 2012 (according to the national statistical office, this population numbered 282,194 at that time). Nine hundred young people were included in the study, and face-to-face interviews were conducted between 29 May and 20 July 2013. The questionnaire comprised oral and written sections.

At the time the study was conducted, Slovenia was undergoing a deep economic crisis; this could not help but have an impact on the final findings. This crisis and the recession it caused affected young people mainly by limiting their employment opportunities. This should be understood as the basic feature of social and economic conditions at the time of the study, with Slovenian young people suffering precarity in living conditions as well as employment. The proportion of young people in full-time or permanent employment had been falling since 1991, but the trend sharpened at this time. The impact was felt more keenly by women, and included those with postgraduate degrees — a group that had seldom previously been faced with unemployment. Young people's earnings originated from permanent employment to a diminishing degree, unemployment rose and wages stagnated. The effect of education on employment prospects became less positive and the Slovenian jobs market remained heavily segmented. Despite all this, the social position of young people could not be characterised across the board as poor or in decline. While some aspects of their social lives had deteriorated, others had improved.

Young people in Slovenia were gradually becoming more and more involved in education, particularly at postgraduate level, with Slovenia even reaching the top of several of the relevant EU rankings. Their private lives were generally free of any particular burdens or obstacles; the majority of families offered understanding and support, in housing and other areas. Although Slovenia was in recession, this family support was aided by a decade of progressive family home construction. Relationships with parents were not placed under strain by old-fashioned restrictions, which (generally) helps to create the conditions for freer relations with peers and partners.

However, young people displayed significant levels of political dissatisfaction and pessimism about the future of society at the time of the study. This negative assessment of politics and democracy was part of the general picture across Slovenia in a period marked by the protest movements of 2012 and 2013, which argued strongly that the political system had lost its legitimacy. In defending their social position, young people in Slovenia were not without political power, as shown by the Slovenian Student Union (Slovenska študentska organizacija), which was an active advocate of their interests. Young people remained largely satisfied with their conditions of life and were, in the main, looked after by the social security system, the education system and their families. One of the conclusions reached by the research team was that young people were coming to terms with the idea of casual and fragmented work.

Young people were making full use of the opportunities provided by the new means of communication and new media, which were also having an impact on their lives.

This was also part of the drive towards individualism detected in previous research, with the highest value being placed on 'career' and 'independence' (cf. Mladina '85 and Mladina 2010). Slovenian young people opted for less binding forms of relationship than their peers in Croatia, although the institution of marriage was still felt to be the priority. In general, inequality had increased in Slovenia while remaining at a relatively low level; social inequality within the Slovenian youth population was to some extent hidden by the expansion and promotion of higher education and by the social support measures available to young people. In contrast to the relatively good position enjoyed by Slovenian youth, there had been a deterioration in the process of transition to adulthood as a result of the difficulty in finding (stable) employment. As one of the main forms of youth employment, precarity was already affecting a solid portion of the adult population at the time the study was conducted; and if young people accepted this situation at their time of life, this would mean changes to their adult lives as well. The proportion of young adults (aged between 24 and 27) almost halved in comparison with 2000 (71.4% vs 40.6% in 2013). At the same time, more young people were staying on in education, and supplementing their income with temporary employment and student work.

### **Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019**

More than 10,000 young people aged between 14 and 29 took part in this study of ten South-East European countries,<sup>6</sup> which was commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. It was the second major study of young people in the region after the FES Youth Studies SEE 2011–15. This new study enabled comparisons to be drawn between changes across the region. Young people responded to survey questions on education, employment, political participation, the family, leisure and ICT use, and values, attitudes and worldviews.

Young people in South-East Europe continued to face high levels of unemployment and precarious working conditions, with a high proportion of NEETs (individuals not in employment, education or training). These figures were particularly high in the countries of the Western Balkans (the Western Balkan Six or WB6), and young people were also faced with anxieties relating to unemployment. Those living in the WB6 reported that they prized public sector employment highly, where membership of a political party was an important precondition for securing a job. Young people from less privileged social backgrounds found it harder to access higher levels of education, take part in social or political activities, become involved in activities in aid of their personal growth and development, use ICT for their educational and information needs, and find suitable employment. Corruption in the education system had always been a feature of all countries of South-East Europe, but had risen in the five years leading up to the study. Tolerance of informal practices, such as use of connections, bribery or tax fraud, was relatively high among young people in the region, and had increased considerably since 2008. A large majority of young people supported the welfare state, particularly those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds, and there were fairly high levels of support among young people in South-Eastern Europe for 'political leaders who govern the country with a strong hand for the public good'. Indeed, this belief had strengthened since 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.



The Central Importance of the Mladina Series

Young people from EU Member States emigrated from their countries of origin less than those whose countries had not yet joined the EU. Young people in the region were generally pro-European, but the majority felt poorly represented by their national politicians; at the same time, they had little experience of political and social participation, aside from voting in elections. Most young people in South-Eastern Europe believed that their political knowledge was poor, and claimed that they were not interested in politics. However, longer periods of living abroad did appear to lead to a greater interest in civic and political participation and to a reduction in nationalist ways of thinking. It should also be noted that most young people in South-Eastern Europe had not had any experience of international learning mobility at the time the study was carried out.

Owing to high levels of unemployment and insufficient support from the state, the majority of the region's young people relied on other financial, housing and educational support. This prolonged the transition to adulthood for many young people. Research showed that 36% of Slovenian respondents were in school, 36% were in post-secondary education, 5% were in some other form of education and 23% were not in any form of education at all (this last figure was the lowest of all the countries surveyed). Of all the countries of South-Eastern Europe, Slovenia was the only one to have achieved the goal set out in the Europe 2020 strategy of having 40% of the population aged between 30 and 34 reaching tertiary education level. None of the Slovenian respondents had dropped out of primary education, only 2.7% had dropped out of secondary education and 16.4% had abandoned their tertiary education studies. Slovenia had the lowest unemployment levels between 2010 and 2016, and was not one of the countries with a higher proportion of young people employed under contract (for full- or part-time work).

## Mladina 2020

Mladina 2020 continued the tradition, by now well-established, of producing comprehensive research into Slovenian youth. It was the result of a collaboration between the Maribor Faculty of Arts and the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences — the two institutions that have been almost exclusively responsible for this type of research since independence — and involved around 1,200 young people aged between 15 and 29.<sup>7</sup> Since Slovenia does not have a system for monitoring the social position of young people, the Mladina 2000 and Mladina 2010 studies were used as the reference framework for the Mladina 2020 study. However, the research team introduced a number of concepts and methodologies that led to the introduction of new topics within the study (e.g. civic spaces for young people) and research into new approaches to existing topics (e.g. participation).

The study was commissioned by the Office for Youth, which needs data for policy-making; the research team therefore focused on ensuring that the study, like Mladina 2010, had an informative value. Evidence-based policymaking and delivery helps political decision-makers make informed decisions on policies, programmes and projects. Youth sector organisations were also invited to help formulate the research plan and identify the specific needs of the sector and of young people themselves (Tanja Baumkirher, interview, 15 April 2021):<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The market research company Aragon contributed to the field surveys.

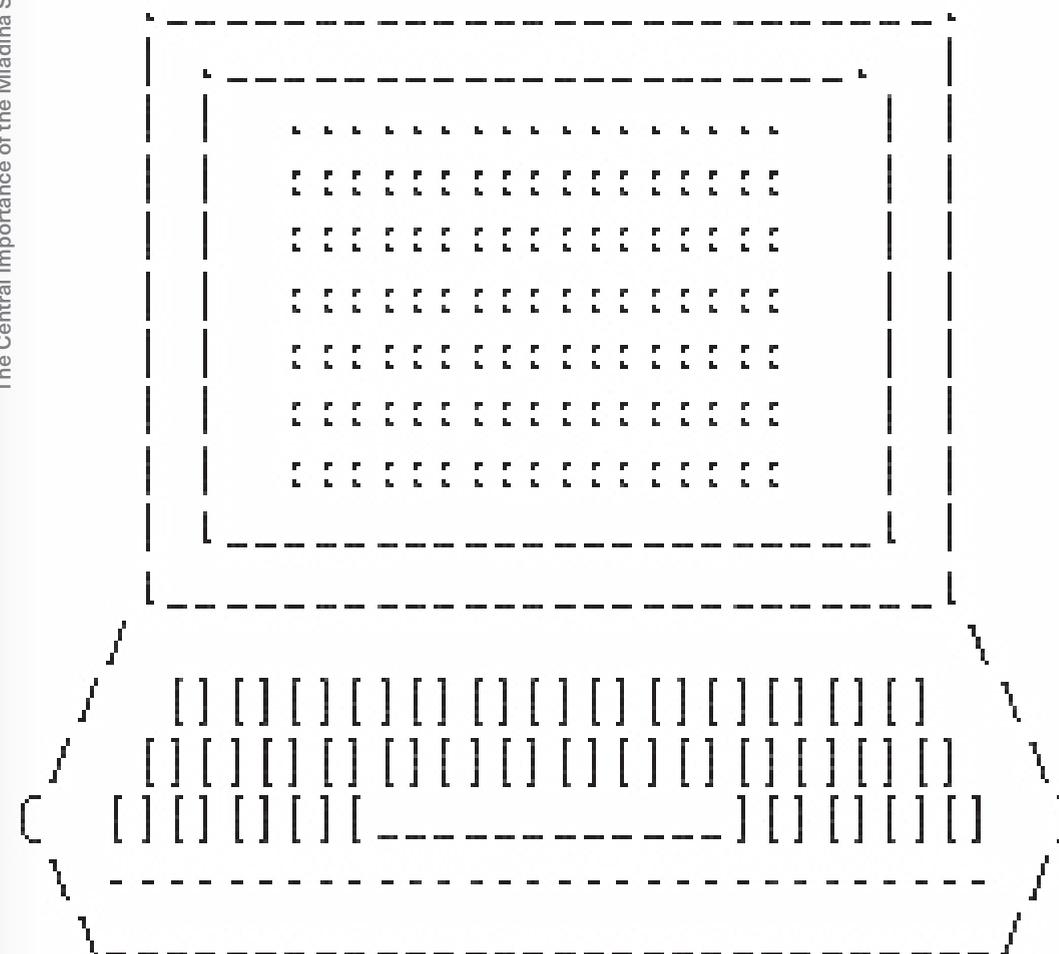
<sup>8</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

*As far as research is concerned, we invest a great deal of hope in the Mladina research studies, which are financed by the Office for Youth. Until this most recent one, there was not much collaboration between the researchers and youth organisations. This time, for Mladina 2020, we were invited to take part, and they sent us questions in advance and asked for our opinions. This is progress.*

Mladina 2020 focused on similar thematic groupings to those set out in the Mladina 2010 research plan: demographics, education, employment, living and housing conditions, health and well-being, political participation, creativity and culture, mobility, use of ICT, consumption, sustainable behaviour and values, and interests.

The study targeted inhabitants of Slovenia who were aged from 15 to 29 on 5 August 2019. The field interviews took place between August and October 2020, and then via the Zoom video-conferencing tool from mid-October because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to the low number of publicly available telephone numbers and the poor response to the written request to supply contact details, just over a third of the surveys were carried out with the help of an online panel. All 1,200 of the planned surveys had been conducted by November 2020, and an important portion of the data came from interviews with youth sector representatives.

The Central Importance of the Mladina Series



The Covid-19 pandemic had an inevitable impact on the results of the study, with respondents being asked to consider how things had been prior to the pandemic; it also had clearly had an impact on the respondents' values, viewpoints, feelings and political behaviour. As the survey was conducted before the autumn school closures, researchers carried out a statistical assessment of the impact on the 15–29 age group; they found that while there were correlations, they tended to be weak. Their conclusion was therefore that the pandemic was having an impact, albeit a small one. They illustrated this with the example of the problem of loneliness —namely, that the pandemic was simply exacerbating a trend that had been present already.

With regard to demographic indicators, the study notes the end of the period of rapid decline in the number of young people, which is having an impact on the degree to which young people are represented in the unemployment figures, as well as on their importance as an electoral base (and, consequently, their political power). It also complements the upward trend in the size of the older population. In the Mladina 2020 study, almost three-quarters of young people reported that they saw this as a big or very big problem; at the same time, the proportion of young people who got along with their parents very well had risen since Mladina 2010, although their expectations of parental assistance in key areas of life had fallen significantly.

From young people's point of view, intergenerational cooperation was good. Young people tended not to mention intergenerational conflict, but were strongly aware of the disadvantages faced by older people when it came to social welfare. More than 60% partly or completely agreed with the statement that young and older people were equally disadvantaged. A similar percentage agreed with the statement that the requirements of the current generations had to be weighed against those to come.

According to Mladina 2020, young people were leaving home earlier than they had been at the time Mladina 2010 was conducted, bringing them closer to the EU average: it fell from 29.7 years to 27.7 years between 2010 and 2019. While this was still above the EU average, as well as the average for neighbouring Austria and Hungary, none of Slovenia's neighbours had experienced a drop of that size. Young people's transition to adulthood was changing and could no longer be regarded as a linear process. Young people were active, responsible and autonomous in a variety of fields of action, many of them linked to issues of mental health, housing and youth employment, which they felt were working against them.

Young people were leaving the formal education system more quickly than was formerly the case; on the other hand, the proportion of young people with experience of learning mobility had risen. While it was still only 23%, this was nine percentage points higher than the figure for 2010. More than half the young people surveyed (54.1%) were planning to undertake educational activities abroad in the future, a rise of 7.3% on 2010. Mobility generally has an important positive impact on development, with a rise in readiness to move elsewhere in Slovenia, to another European country or even to another continent (see Figure 1). The biggest rise, of just over 17 percentage points, was in the readiness to move to another European country, which was to some extent the result of the fact that Slovenia had been an EU member for some years by that point. The desire to move away from Slovenia for more than six months had also risen, to 75% in 2020, with the biggest rise coming between 2018 and 2020.

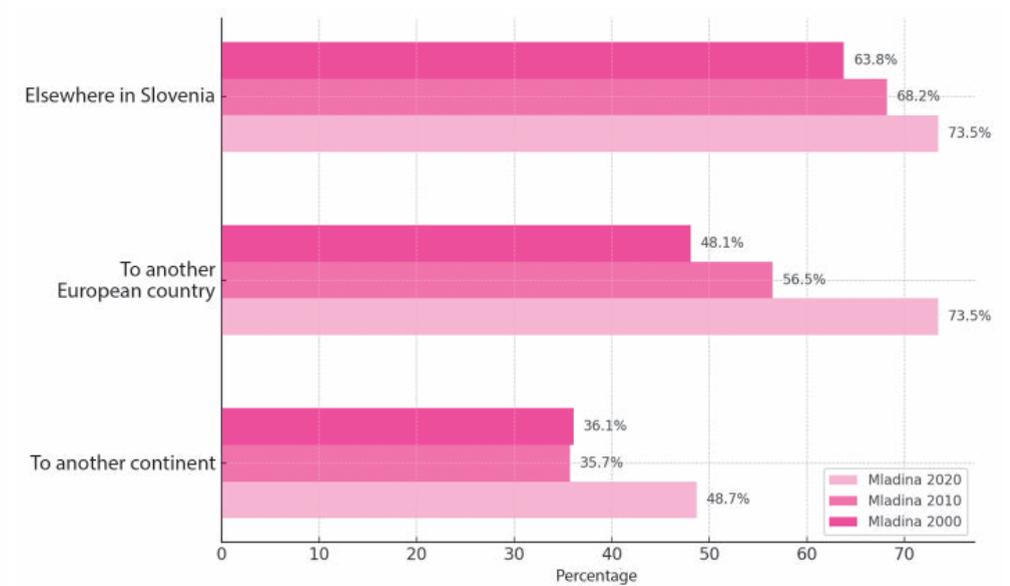


Figure 1: If it offered you better creative and general living opportunities, would you be prepared to move for a longer period or permanently? Sources: Mladina 2000, Mladina 2010 and Mladina 2020.

Young people were making greater use of non-formal and informal education tools than before. Outside their regular school education, they took part in courses, workshops and training programmes covering foreign languages, culture and art, undertook preparations for their driving test, and acquired various forms of vocational knowledge. The numbers were up considerably on a decade earlier, by eight percentage points (13 percentage points in case of the driving test).

For informal learning, young people made considerable use of the online tools and new educational opportunities that had not been as available to the generations before them, although the internet was increasingly being used to a significant degree for online shopping. Slovenian young people were in the bottom half of the EU ranking when it came to the proportion of young people with knowledge of computer programming, and their use of ICT tools was generally restricted to basic tasks — all of which suggests that education policy should prioritise this area in the future.

Despite the fact that youth unemployment had fallen as a result of demographic changes, Slovenia still had a higher number of precariously employed young people than the European average. The Mladina 2020 study revealed that young people's position on the jobs market was relatively unfavourable, with two-thirds prepared to take up self-employment in order to stave off unemployment. The notion of enterprise had gained currency among the young, with the researchers noting a decline in enthusiasm for employment in the public sector (cf. the section on the Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, p. 11). Employment security remained important, but less so than the requirement for work to be interesting, provide a high degree of autonomy and have a clear objective. The percentage of young people who said that they were prepared to accept a job in a lower position with lower pay, temporary employment or employment that came with a requirement to acquire new knowledge or skills had also risen, to around 92%. Fear of unemployment was obviously one result of this, and was felt by more than 40% of young people surveyed for Mladina 2020.

This fear had been higher two years previously (YSEE 2018), when it stood at 43%, but was still very high compared to a decade or two previously (27% and 21.8%, see Mladina 2020, p. 365). There had been a concomitant decline in the popularity of self-employment, down from 43% of those in favour of it in Mladina 2010 to 32.1% in Mladina 2020. To a large extent, the readiness to move away for better living conditions was connected with employment.

One worrying finding in relation to health and well-being was that the proportion of young people who felt lonely had increased. Mladina 2020 found a significant increase in feelings of stress or loneliness from Mladina 2010 (for stress from 17% to 36% and for loneliness from 9% to over 30%), although this comes with a caveat: the later study was conducted after the Covid-19 pandemic and the earlier one ten years before it (see Figure 2). In response to the high levels of worry and stress among the young, Mladina 2020 emphasises the responsibility the current holders of political and social power have in helping them realise their visions and meet the challenges of the future.

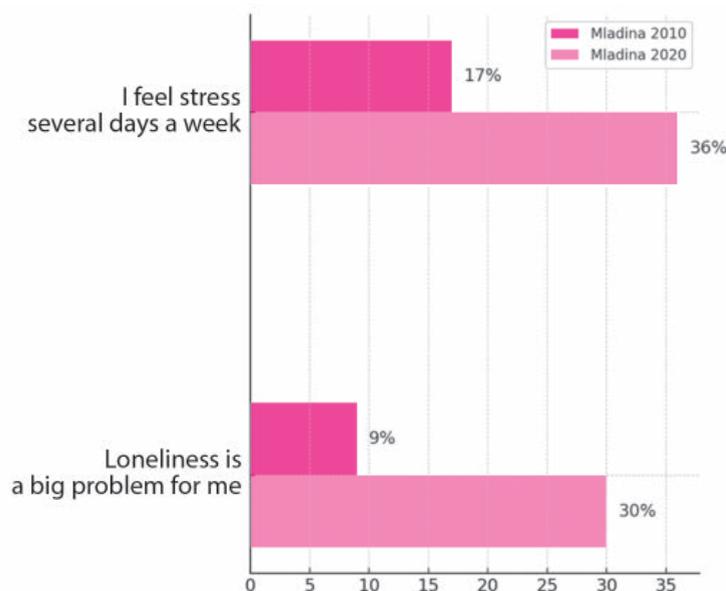


Figure 2: Feelings of stress and loneliness among young people in 2010 and 2020. Sources: Mladina 2010 and Mladina 2020.

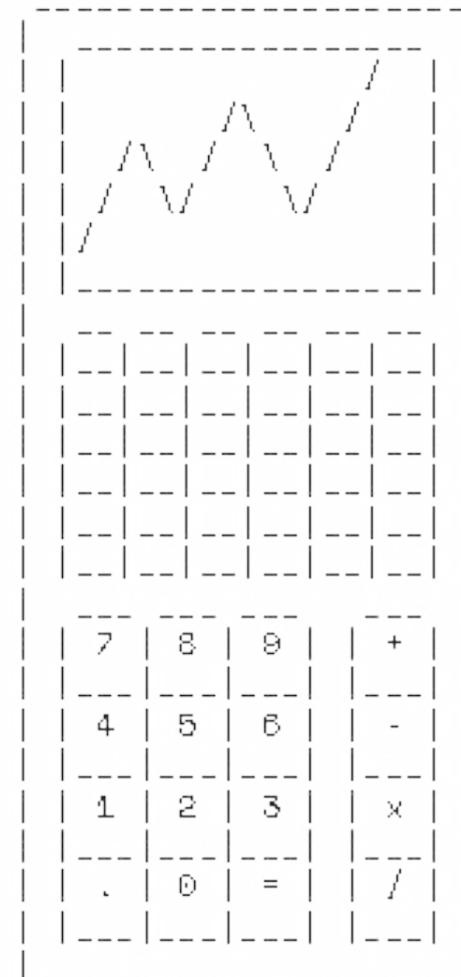
There had also been a perceptible rise in the number of young people who were pessimistic about the future, i.e. a significant fall in young people's satisfaction with life. Generally speaking, young people were increasingly less satisfied with their health, but also devoted more attention to it, which may reflect the negative impact of wider social conditions. Mladina 2020 highlighted mental health as one of the key challenges of youth policy, both now and in the future. There were noticeably higher levels of abstinence from alcohol, a noticeably lower percentage of young smokers, and a clear increase in the number of young people involved in sport and exercise (Mladina 2020, p. 201). However, these positive trends, as well as objective living factors such as lower unemployment and higher income, do not signal a general

improvement in young people's psycho-physical health. Indeed, the indicators of stress and problems maintaining a healthy weight suggest the opposite: a general deterioration in young people's health. Mental health problems were also highlighted by the strategies used to deal with them. Just over 14% of young people, for example, used alcohol and drugs to ease their problems.

The study also focused on exposure to hate speech resulting from increased use of ICT tools. More than 80% of young people witnessed hate speech on multiple occasions every month, and 70% believed that there was too much hate speech in Slovenian society. As far as the impact on the public sphere and political activism was concerned, Mladina 2020 found that young people were more involved in asserting their civic rights than they had been a decade earlier. There appeared to be little interest in politics, reflecting the low levels of trust in politicians. This was having a negative impact on electoral participation, which also remained low. While there was less focus on institutional politics, young people's levels of social engagement were high, with the personal aspects of political engagement being regarded as important.

They used conventional and unconventional forms of political participation, such as political consumerism, rejecting (boycotting) certain products, making purchases for political, ethical and environmental reasons, and signing petitions. It appears that environmentally responsible consumer behaviour and consumer activism are becoming increasingly common modes of political expression among young people, who also reported that they were more inclined to communicate with politicians directly. However, there were also concerns about radicalisation, with a quarter believing that violence was legitimate if carried out in pursuit of higher ends.

Mladina 2020 found that housing issues were directly affecting an increasing percentage of young people. This was partly the result of the earlier departure from the parental home noted above; it is when they leave home that young people feel dissatisfied with a policy that seems oblivious to the housing pressures they are experiencing (see Figure 3). The study revealed that, regardless of the Living Apart Together (LAT) phenomenon, young people's values were changing in Slovenia, pointing to a gradual transition to other forms of independence linked to global trends and greater internationalisation. If we compare the 2010 and 2020 studies, there has been a sharp rise in the percentage of young people who have personal experience



of housing problems, particularly the financial aspect of purchasing or renting an apartment. Young people's satisfaction with their living conditions is limited, matching their limited opportunities to buy their own home. Home ownership remains a strong aspiration and is linked to the longstanding housing pattern in Slovenia, where levels of home ownership are high and rental apartments hard to come by. However, this has not stopped the rise in the number of young people looking to rent.

Young people from larger cities such as Ljubljana and Maribor gain their independence earlier. Fewer of them live with their parents and fewer expect parental help to resolve their housing issues. Young people's attachment to their home environment and unwillingness to 'fly the nest' persist (this is particularly the case among older young people), although their living preferences are gradually changing. Housing pressures are linked to temporary employment and associated forms of precarity, as they adversely affect young people's creditworthiness — something the financial sector continues to ignore. Young people tend to continue to depend on parental support. According to some indicators, there has been a fall in precarity (by almost 13 percentage points), but it remains very high and affects more than 60% of young people in work.

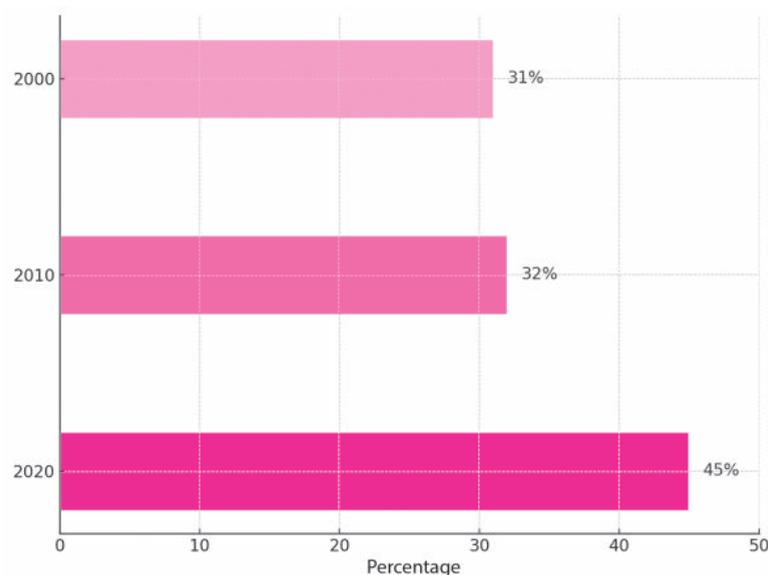


Figure 3: To what extent do the following problems faced by young people apply to you? HOUSING (apply or very much apply)? Sources: *Mladina 2010* and *Mladina 2020*.

*Mladina 2020* is different in many ways from the research conducted in the 1990s. Slovenia has undergone major social change, a new European context has emerged and the research teams are also different. It revealed a great many advantages to being young in Slovenia, but perhaps just as many disadvantages. The relatively small size of the youth population is a concern, as are its lower degree of political influence, its lower (but nevertheless still high) involvement in education, precarity in employment and elsewhere, feelings of stress and loneliness, the fall in general satisfaction, avoidance of social issues, and the dangers of radicalisation. However, the study does find plenty to be optimistic about: the end of the demographic decline, good

intergenerational relations, earlier departure from the parental home, the opportunities offered by the internet, flexibility in attitudes to the jobs market, care for one's own health, the adoption of liberal values, artistic creation, and unconventional forms of activism and political participation, for example. All of this points to an open society with considerable personal autonomy, but also one that demands a great deal of responsibility from its members.

## Needs and future of research

Youth research has a rich tradition in Slovenia — one that has, to a considerable extent, been fostered by the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Science and the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts in Maribor. There are also other research organisations and institutes in Slovenia that provide those tasked with formulating public and youth policy with a clear overview of the needs of Slovenian youth. Current mayor of Ajdovščina and former deputy chair of the National Youth Council Tadej Beočanin is concise in arguing for research into young people and their needs (interview, 15 April 2021):

*Research organisations, faculties, universities and various youth policy-centred institutions around the country can help to ensure that youth policy is truly based on research, thereby enabling it to respond to the most pressing needs.*

The need has also emerged to strengthen youth research in Slovenia. As the research team responsible for producing the *Mladina 2020* study pointed out, '[T]he partnership between the two universities [...] can be understood as the basis for the development of a research and analytical structure that will meet this need, which is also set out in the National Youth Programme 2013–2022' (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021). The current director of the Office for Youth Dolores Kores has also pointed out that, for them, research is of key importance to the formulation of youth policies. However, there are also concerns that there will soon be no money for this, as some in the youth sector believe that it is research that will bear the brunt of cuts in the next few years (Uroš Skrinar, interview, 6 May 2021).

Evidence-based policymaking has long been a feature of European documents and organisations. Back in 2009, when the first EU Youth Strategy was published, the European Commission stressed the importance of evidence-based policymaking: 'Better knowledge is a must for sound policy. Current tools (e.g. Eurostat data, national reports, European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKYP), EU Research Framework Programme) are a first step, as well as the triennial report on Youth in Europe. There is an equal need to share research results and for networking of researchers throughout Europe.' Several European observatories, such as the European Observatory on Infringements of Intellectual Property Rights, embed within their operations the provision of evidence-based papers and data that enable policymakers to formulate effective policies for enforcing intellectual property rights and support innovation and creativity (Cink, 2016).

In May 2017 the Council of Europe recommended that Member States' governments 'foster national and European research on the different forms of youth work and their value, impact and merit.' They also suggested that they 'encourage the use of research, evaluation and continuous follow-up in developing knowledge-based, quality youth work ensuring that mechanisms are in place to measure its outcomes and impact' (Council of Europe, 2017). Kores highlights the same, mentioning as an example the Porto Social Summit declaration of 2021. She argues that it is also

important that 'in the end, we are able to compare ourselves with other countries in which there is some sort of unified system' (interview, 18 May 2021).

In the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the Commission, in the section on evidence-based youth policy-making and knowledge-building, argued that 'EU Youth Policy should be evidence-based and anchored in the real needs and situations of young people. That requires continuous research, knowledge development and outreach to young people and youth organisations. The collection of disaggregated data on young people is of particular importance to foster understanding of the needs of different groups of young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. Evidence based policy-making should be carried out with the support of the Youth Wiki, youth research networks, cooperation with international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OECD and other bodies, including youth organisations' (Council of the European Union, 2018).

'Evidence-based policymaking' is also mentioned in the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (ReNPM 2013–22). Section 1.4, which deals with the monitoring of the National Youth Programme, envisages the 'use of a combination of three types of indicator based on the previously mentioned formulation of evidence-based public policies, with the monitoring and evaluation of the National Youth Programme at the core of the system.' The Resolution also provides for the establishment of a youth research unit within existing research organisations; this is a response to its finding that, despite the intensity of the research financed by the Office for Youth, Slovenia does not have in place a comprehensive system for monitoring the position of young people, even though the European Commission requires one for reporting purposes.

The need for collaboration between youth sector entities was well outlined by one of our interviewees, Tanja Baumkircher, who argued that 'the most important thing [in youth policy] [was] good cooperation between the political sphere (those that make policy and those that deliver it), youth organisations and researchers. They must also work with each other on a "one-to-one" basis' (interview, 15 April 2021). She also stressed that 'researchers [were] necessary mainly in order to cover the wider youth population and ascertain where it stood at any one time. Research provides a suitable basis for policymaking' (ibid.).

The lives of young people have been heavily marked in the last few years by the Covid-19 pandemic. A strong need has emerged for a long-term analysis of its consequences, for young people and for youth as a sector. We will only be able to identify the permanent impacts of the pandemic in a few years' time and for a few years after that, mainly with the help of comprehensive research into young people, their lives and their position within society. It makes sense, therefore, to finish with the words of Dr Peter Debeljak, former director of the Office for Youth, and his vision for youth research in the future (interview, 7 May 2021): 'Evidence-based! Why? Not because this is something we should do anyway, but because it can be the anchor point from which we start.'

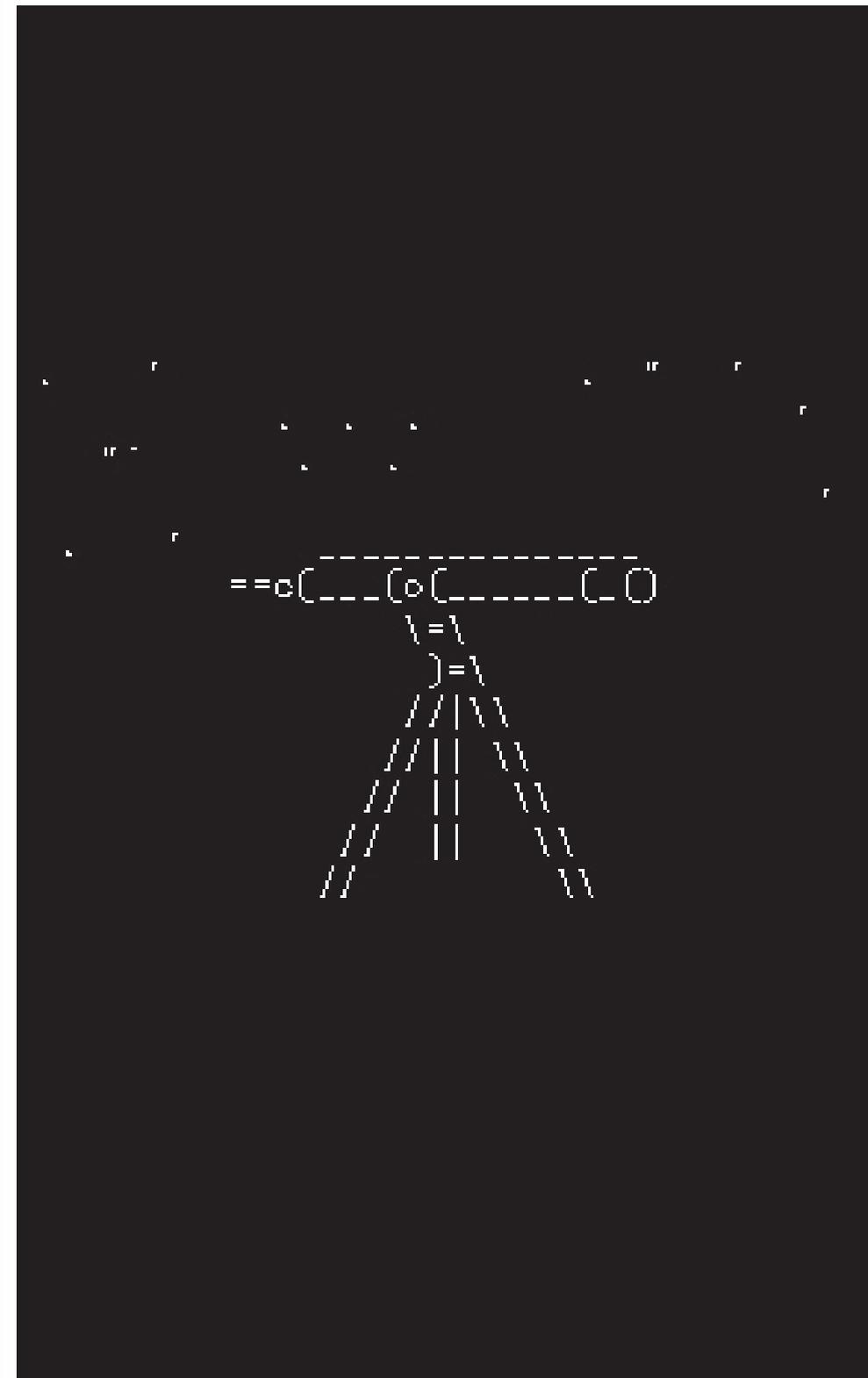
## Looking towards the future

- Regular and comprehensive youth research is required if we are to gain an insight into and monitor trends in the field of youth and in the values and beliefs of young people.
- To gain an adequate insight into the lives of young people and monitor the achievement of the objectives set out in the National Youth Programme, a mechanism should be established to enable indicators relating to young people and the youth sector to be monitored continuously (such as a youth observatory and youth index).
- To guarantee synergies in the research field, a range of incentives must be created to strengthen cooperation and connections between researchers and research institutions in youth research and youth work, and to encourage cooperation with youth sector organisations and policymakers.
- To make it easier to compare the data and findings contained in other countries' research studies, international cooperation between researchers and research organisations should be encouraged, particularly at European level (EU, Council of Europe).
- To maintain and strengthen the quality of youth research and research into young people, the established quality assurance standards applicable in Slovenia and set out in the Scientific Research and Innovation Activities Act (2021) and the regulation of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency must be adhered to.
- Support must be given to the establishment of a joint repository of data on youth and young people that contains information from all the relevant research studies, analyses and statistical monitoring operations, and is accessible to researchers and other interested parties at home and abroad.

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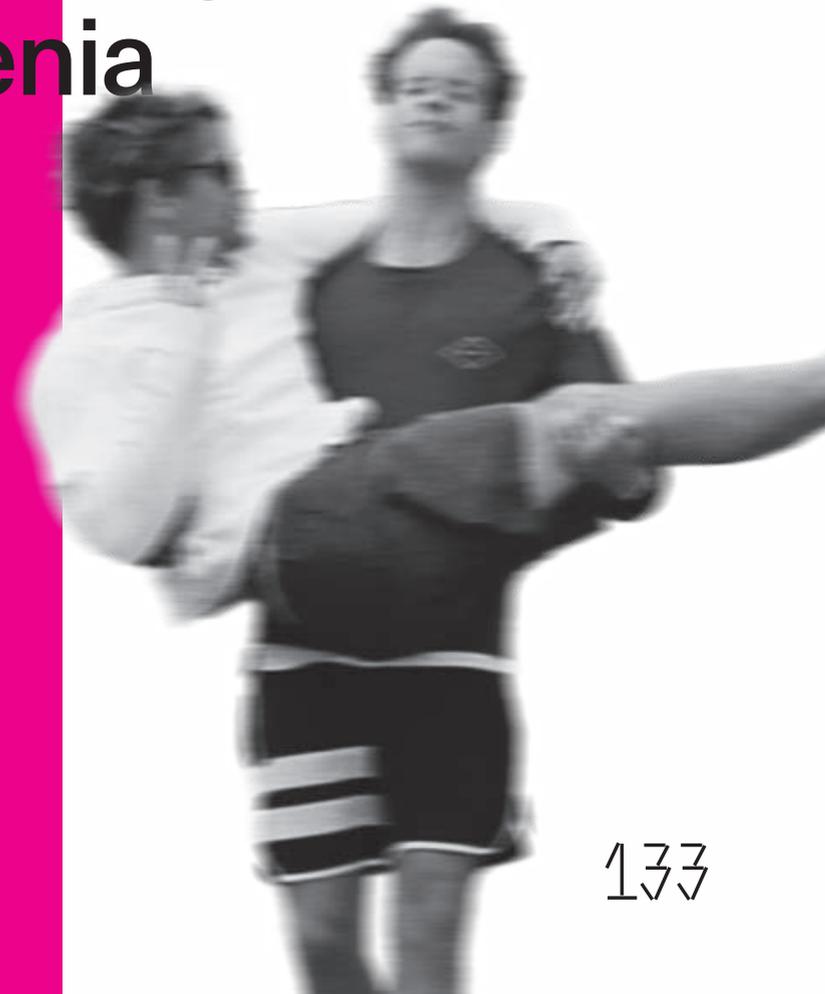
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# The **Chapter 6** Transition to Adulthood

Thirty Years  
of Youth Work  
in Slovenia

**Nina Vombergar**  
**Tomaž Deželan**



# Key milestones in the development of youth work in Slovenia

**1990:** National Youth Council of Slovenia founded

**2004:** EU membership (Slovenia now a full beneficiary of European youth programmes)

**2005:** Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy Until 2010

**2010:** Council Resolution on Youth Work

**2010:** Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act

**2013:** Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022

**2017:** Catalogue of Standards for the Youth Worker NVQ published

**2019:** EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027

**2020:** Council Resolution on the Framework for Establishing a European Youth Work Agenda

## Connecting young people and wider society: the importance, objectives and impacts of youth work

While the term 'youth work' (*mladinsko delo*) has been in common use in Slovenia for quite a few years, it took some time to gain wider currency after independence in 1991. This does not mean that youth work did not exist in the 1990s, but simply that it was called something else (Barbara Zupan, interview, 21 April 2021):<sup>1</sup>

*In the 1990s we did not have a definition of youth work, but examples of good practice. However, these examples were voluntary work, youth brigades, youth policy work or social work with young people — that is to say, everything but youth work. It was only later that people began to think about what youth work could mean.*

Today the various definitions of youth work tend to settle on the idea that it connects young people, the local community and wider society, addresses the needs of young people, enables young people to have a voice, and equips young people with experiences, knowledge and skills. Alongside this, youth work is required to constantly develop and respond to social conditions and changes, with the main emphasis on adapting to the needs of young people in a given space at a given time. Above all, youth work is about encouraging young people to become involved in society as active citizens.

The objectives of youth work are connected to the personal development of the individual and to the establishment of social cohesion and development. The former involves promoting emancipation, empowerment, the development of responsibility, a cooperative spirit and the taking of initiative (Coburn, 2011; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Lee, 1999; YouthLink Scotland, 2017), while the latter relates to fostering active participation, inclusion and a deeper understanding of social relations, challenges and problems, and to taking preventive action (ibid.). Youth work provides young people with the opportunity to engage in non-formal learning, test their knowledge in practice, and exert an influence on the community and society in which they live and work. In short, youth work encourages young people to form and express their own opinions and become active participants in society. 'Youth work is hence a process of learning, not only for young people, but also for society as such' (European Charter on Local Youth Work, 2019).

The target group addressed by youth work is, of course, young people. The Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju) defines young people as individuals aged between 15 and 29, and this age definition also forms the basis for measures and for the financing (and co-financing) of programmes and projects for young people at national and European level. As individuals within this age group, young people are a diverse group with different interests and needs. Whether the target group comprises all young people or a specific subset thereof depends on the activity or the youth work organisation involved. Youth organisations' vision and mission statements often address the challenges faced by specific groups of young people, or the specific challenges highlighted by the funders of youth work. The Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu za mladino 2013–2022) places particular emphasis on young people with fewer opportunities, including opportunities relating to youth work.

<sup>1</sup> Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

Suitable premises, in all places or environments in which young people live, are vital for the proper delivery of youth work. Youth work addresses the needs, wishes and challenges of young people in ways that the formal education system and other organisations are unable to do — and in many cases do not know how to do. In other words, spaces in which youth work can be carried out should be available to all young people regardless of where they live. However, the way existing infrastructure is distributed around the country means that some young people have many more opportunities to spend time at youth centres or other youth organisations than others; indeed, some have no such opportunities at all because of where they live. Figures from the *Mladina 2020* (Youth 2020) study show that 44.2% of young people never visit youth centres, student clubs or other similar places, and a further 30% visit them less than once a month. For the purposes of comparison, just over two-thirds (67.2%) of young people spend free time at shopping centres at least once a month (some figures suggest that Slovenia has the highest number of square metres of shopping centre per capita in the world). In answer to the question of how many opportunities there are for cultural activities in youth centres and similar places where they live, just over a third of young people say 'too few' (*Mladina 2020*). These findings suggest that accessible local infrastructure is an important factor in dictating where young people spend their free time.

Youth work responds to the needs of individuals and the wider social reality, as its practice tends to reflect. Being based on the principles of voluntary participation, and given that it is organised and delivered in collaboration with young people (and, on occasions, entirely by young people themselves), youth work contributes to young people's personal and social development, encourages young people to think critically about and participate actively in the world around them, and is based on accessibility, equality and empowerment (Lee, 1999; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Gormally and Coburn, 2014; YouthLink Scotland, 2014; Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium, 2015; Brady et al., 2016; de St Croix, 2019; European Charter on Local Youth Work, 2019). Youth work is a set of pre-planned activities with defined educational objectives that are achieved through methods of non-formal and informal learning (*ibid.*), and comprises methodologically and substantively diverse structured and unstructured activities (Brady et al., 2016; Brady and Redmond, 2017). At both local and national level, youth work is an important space in which young people receive information and advice (Devlin and Gunning, 2009), and support in resolving personal issues (Dunne et al., 2014).

Youth work brings young people and the local community together, has positive effects on individuals and the community alike (Williamson, 2017), serves as a link between young people, educational institutions and the local community, and promotes the development of (young) individuals and of the local community in general (Baizerman, 1996; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; YouthLink Scotland, 2017). It also provides a space in which different social groups can meet, as it fosters a plurality of activities involving young people, other individuals and groups from the local community. These activities can be connected to culture, sport, personal and/or social development, environmental protection, enterprise, social engagement, and take place in spaces that provide an inclusive, safe and stimulating environment in which young people can develop into responsible and active citizens through structured activities; they therefore provide opportunities for the social and economic problems that arise in the local community to be resolved (Idecon, 2012). Supporting youth work therefore

means encouraging young people to become actively involved in co-creating their local and wider environment, where 'organisations involved in youth work should be treated as partners in a civil dialogue that addresses young people and the community' (Deželan and Vombergar, 2019).

Youth work is an area that has an impact on the young people involved in it, and on the community and society of which those young people are part. The impacts of youth work are varied and diverse, in line with the variety and diversity of the areas with which it is involved. It also reaches different target groups, from young people generally to specific groups of young people. We can identify the impacts of youth work at the level of the individual (i.e. on their personal characteristics and professional development) and at the level of society, which is reflected in the development of the community and wider society as well as in economic development (Lee, 1999; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Dunne et al., 2014; Gormally and Coburn, 2014; Williamson, 2017; YouthLink Scotland, 2017; Zubulake, 2017; Lardier et al., 2018). As far as the impacts on individuals' personal characteristics are concerned, these can emerge in the form of increased self-confidence, improved self-image and a more optimistic outlook, more successful and satisfying personal (formal and informal) and social relationships, the acquisition of experiences that lead to a more reasonable judgement and assessment of and greater control over one's own life, and improved health as a result of being better informed about healthy lifestyles and the dangers of substance abuse (*ibid.*). The positive effects on an individual's professional characteristics come mainly in the form of the acquisition of knowledge and skills through formal learning processes, the ability to work effectively within groups, improved formal educational outcomes, and greater employability (*ibid.*).

Youth work also has a direct (positive) impact on the community in the form of more active participation by young people in the community and society generally, a commitment on the part of young people to solidarity (including inter-generational solidarity), an inclusive society and the equality of different social groups, increased feelings of security, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships at the personal and community level, and lower rates of substance abuse among young people (Lee, 1999; Strycharczyk et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2016; YouthLink Scotland, 2017). With respect to the impacts on the economy, Idecon (2012) and Minton (2017) point out that youth work creates new jobs, improves local services, works preventively to reduce legal, healthcare and social security costs, and brings youth organisations, schools, local communities and private sector organisations together through various programmes.

## **Institutional framework and the funding of youth work in Slovenia**

Youth work began to develop in conceptual terms in the 1990s. The National Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije, MSS) was set up in 1990, immediately after independence; this was followed a year later by the Office for Youth (Urad RS za mladino, URSM), located within the Ministry of Education and Sport. Initiatives to devise a youth programme soon arose at national and European level, while local youth work began to develop through youth organisations and youth centres. With Slovenia's accession to the European Union in 2004, the youth programmes that had been created by the Office for Youth were joined by European youth programmes. The breakthrough for youth work in Slovenia came in 2005 with the publication by

the Office of a five-year youth policy strategy designed to improve the conditions for the performance of youth work and raise its profile (Pazlar, 2009, 21–22); prior to that, youth work had developed through the interaction of practices of youth projects from the period prior to independence, adapting to new conditions and the actual needs of young people as it went along. It was, in the words of the Office's Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy of 2005, 'ahead of the theory', which was still the case in youth work at the time. In that document, the Office also noted that 'the Slovenian youth field operates somewhat under the influence of activist enthusiasm, pioneering work and charismatic figures on the scene' (Office for Youth, 2005).

In the 2010 Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council, youth work was recognised as organised work

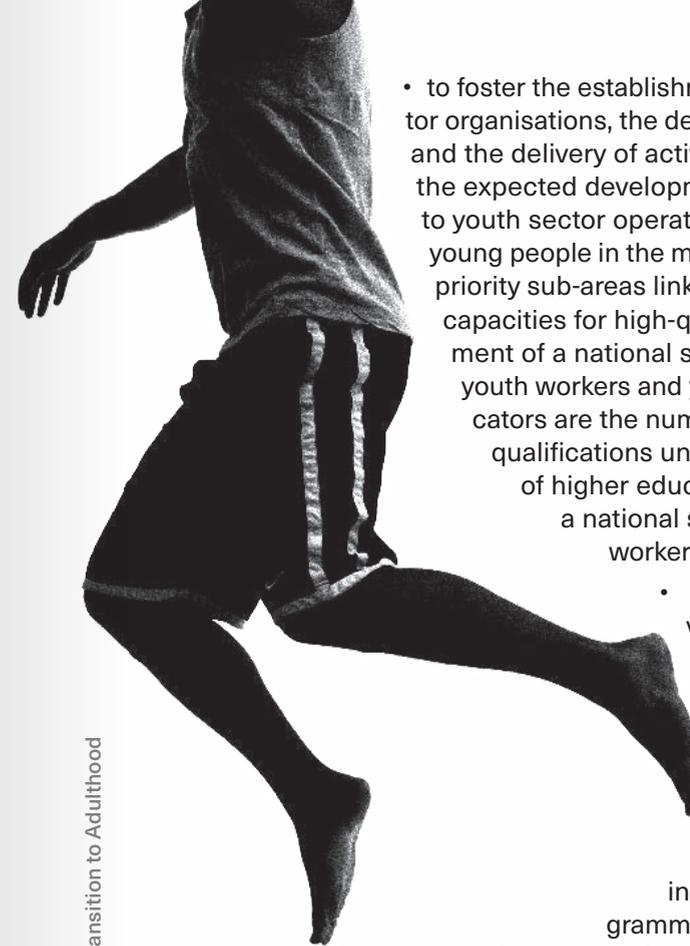
*covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people ... [It] takes place in the extra-curricular area, as well as through specific leisure-time activities, and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational or pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders [...]* (Council of the European Union, 2010).

The Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act from 2010, which provided the legal basis for the drafting of the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022, facilitated the further development of youth work, as well as the expansion of the youth sector in Slovenia, while the growth in funds earmarked for youth centres helped to strengthen youth work at national and local level. It provided the first legal definition of youth work in Slovenia, referring to it as:

*an organised and targeted form of activity by and for young people within which they contribute, through their own efforts, to their inclusion in society, bolster their skills and help the community to develop. The delivery of various forms of youth work is based on the voluntary participation of young people regardless of their interests, their cultural affiliations, their world view or their politics.*

This definition has given rise to a variety of others — indeed, there are almost as many definitions today as there are organisations whose activities touch upon the field of youth work. Nevertheless, these differing interpretations of the term do have several points in common: 'learning experiences' within non-formal education, a 'planned process' with expected outcomes, 'active participation' that encourages young people to take a more active part in society, and 'personal and social development' of the young people who are involved in and shaped by the youth work process, for example (Beočanin, 2011, 51–52).

Slovenia does not have a separate youth work strategy, although the legal framework being provided by the Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act. As that law sets out, the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 is the basic programming document defining the priorities and measures within the youth sector. It does not contain a separate section on youth work, which is incorporated into the section titled 'Young people, society and the importance of the youth sector'. The aims of the Resolution as they relate to youth work are:



The Transition to Adulthood

- to foster the establishment and development of youth sector organisations, the development of key youth sector fields and the delivery of activities for non-organised youth, with the expected development outcome being improvements to youth sector operations and increased participation by young people in the management of social affairs. The two priority sub-areas linked to youth work are the creation of capacities for high-quality youth work and the establishment of a national system of education and training for youth workers and youth leaders. The two relevant indicators are the number of people gaining youth worker qualifications under education programmes or parts of higher education programmes (by gender), and a national system of training in place for youth workers and youth leaders;

- to encourage and strengthen involvement in international youth work and learning mobility in youth work, with the expected development outcome being an increase in the mobility of young people within the youth sector. The indicators connected to youth work are: the number of young people involved in non-formal education mobility programmes; the number of national schemes for encouraging international cooperation in the youth

sector and learning mobility in youth work with individual countries or individual target groups of young people; the number of programmes for encouraging local units to become involved in international youth work and the delivery of learning mobility by national youth organisations; the number of international youth work training activities taking place in Slovenia; and the number of youth leaders and workers taking part in such training programmes, whether in Slovenia or abroad, in any given year;

- to bolster youth research and analysis, with the expected development outcome being the provision of long-term and stable youth research. Within the priority sub-area, which presupposes the establishment of a national youth research organisation, there is also an indicator relating to the number of analyses and research studies that examine and evaluate the impact of international youth work and learning mobility in youth work;
- to improve young people's skillsets, with the expected development outcome being easier access to the labour market for young people. One of the priority sub-areas relates to the establishment of comprehensive recognition of non-formal forms of knowledge and experience, and the integration of formal and non-formal education. The indicators in this priority sub-area are: the placing of the issue of the non-recognition of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal settings on the agenda of political decision-makers; the introduction of youth worker and youth

leader status in secondary and higher education (along the lines of the status awarded to athletes and cultural workers in Slovenia); and active participation in youth sector organisations as part of compulsory elective subjects at school.

The draft new Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2023–32 mentions youth work in the ‘Youth and society’ section. Among other things the objectives of youth work reflect the sector’s efforts to develop high-quality youth work within the Bonn Process, the aim of which is to implement the European Youth Work Agenda. Those objectives are:

- to promote and develop quality in youth work, with the expected development outcome being that young people acquire additional skills by taking part in high-quality youth work. As part of this objective, research is planned on the impacts of youth work, the setting of quality standards in youth work, the establishment of a system for drawing up records of activities and the monitoring of the impacts of youth work;
- to recognise and acknowledge youth work, with the expected development outcome being the promotion of the benefits of youth work. The activities and measures envisaged include informing the public about youth work projects and activities through the media, encouraging local communities to invest in youth work programmes, encouraging youth sector organisations and schools to work together, and publicising the national vocational qualification for youth workers more widely;
- to consolidate the funding of youth work programmes, with the expected development outcome being increased investment in those programmes, which will enable more young people to take part in the design, delivery and evaluation of youth work.
- To aid implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, a national expert working group was set up and tasked with raising the quality and profile of youth work (Državna strokovna delovna skupina za dvig kakovosti in prepoznavnosti mladinskega dela). It drafted a strategic plan for 2022–2027/32, and coordinated it with youth sector organisations. The overall objectives of the strategic plan are:
- to improve and develop quality in youth work, with an eye on ensuring a consistent understanding of quality in youth work based on a community of practice and the framework set out in the final Declaration of the Third European Youth Work Convention. Quality in youth work should also be defined as an objective in the National Youth Programme. A further aim is to provide a clear description of the impacts of youth work, using that as a basis for establishing criteria and standards for the delivery and monitoring of youth work, and a unified, free-of-charge system for recording activities and monitoring the impacts of youth work. The objective also envisages the organisation of education and training on this topic, and seeks to secure an environment that supports the delivery of high-quality youth work at national and local level, and to monitor the quality and boost the profile of youth work;
- to raise the profile and enhance the identity of youth work through efforts to increase the visibility of youth organisations and youth work programmes among young people and the participation of young people in youth work. A further aim is to ensure that formal education recognises the added value gained by linking up with youth work, and to communicate the impacts of youth work to different stakeholders. There is also a focus on efforts to recognise the value of and

support for youth work by the private sector. Youth work should be recognised by decision-makers as distinct from other (albeit similar) areas, and efforts should be made to empower youth workers and organisations to present the impacts of youth work and emphasise the value of the youth work profession.

The Office for Youth has funded youth work and youth work programmes through public co-financing calls since it was founded in 1991. The amounts available have fluctuated over the years, increasing from EUR 1.36 million in 2007 to EUR 1.42 million in 2010, for example, before falling to its lowest level in 15 years in 2014 (when only EUR 1.01 million was allocated to youth work). Since 2015, public calls have been published every two years rather than annually (2016/17, 2018/19, 2020/21, 2022/23 and 2024/25), with the funds available once again gradually increasing. The 2016/17 call allocated EUR 1.2 million to youth work, and the calls for 2018/2019 and 2020/21 EUR 2.9 million (i.e. EUR 1.45 million for each year). This is comparable to the annual funds allocated to youth work a decade ago. Funds rose again in the 2022/23 call, to EUR 1.925 million a year (EUR 3.83 million over two years). The current call (2024/25) proposes to allocate a total of EUR 3.68 million, or EUR 1.84 million a year, to youth work.

Since 2007 the number of applications to public calls by national youth organisations has, in most cases, matched the number of national youth organisation programmes financed; over this period, between 11 and 14 national youth organisations have applied to the call, with only two of them failing to obtain funds. The highest average amount of funding received in this period was EUR 24,167 (2015) and the lowest was EUR 13,846 (2008). The number of applications to calls by youth centres has fluctuated between 52 and 70 since 2007. All applicants were successful in 2010, although selection was at its highest in 2012. The highest average amount of funding received in this period was EUR 11,895 (2007) and the lowest was EUR 9,737 (2014). In the last five calls, the following totals have been allocated to all youth work programmes together: EUR 2.40 million in 2016/17, EUR 2.90 million in 2018/19, EUR 2.88 million in 2020/21, EUR 3.79 million in 2022/23 and EUR 3.66 million in 2024/25. At the end of 2023, the Office for Youth also published a public call, ‘Z mladinskimi delom proti prekarnosti mladih’, which focuses on training youth workers to address the issue of precarity, providing young people, youth sector organisations and the public with information on precarity in the youth population, raising awareness of the importance of work-related and social rights, and giving advice and support to young people. The plan involves 400 youth workers and at least 6,630 young people. The call is being held as part of the European Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 in Slovenia.

Other significant opportunities for the funding of youth work are available at European level, for example via Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps calls, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund. There is no systematic data available on how much public funding is allocated to youth work in local communities, municipalities or nationally. The system of channelling funds directly to selected organisations via the Office for Youth and allocating European funds via national agencies does bring certain risks. Funds are given to organisations that have become proficient at writing applications to calls of this type; they do not necessarily reach organisations that are capable of carrying out high-quality youth work, particularly in areas where young people do not have as many opportunities, but are perhaps less skilled at writing applications. In other words, young people should be

entitled, in all local contexts, to become involved in (local) youth work, meaning that a comparable share of funding must be provided for young people in every municipality. Youth worker Jurij Šarman believes that municipalities could then allocate funds for youth work to local organisations that deliver youth work programmes: 'The transfer of European and national funds to the local level is essential. I see a big opportunity for the state, together with municipalities, to amend the Local Self-Government Act and make youth work a compulsory task of municipalities. Youth work takes place in the local environment. So money needs to come to that environment' (interview, 14 April 2021).

This also raises the question of who is entitled to funding via the Office for Youth's public calls. Calls are currently open to youth councils, youth centres, and youth and other organisations; and this wide range of eligible beneficiaries and the limited funding available means that there is a lack of funding for youth work per se. Šarman believes that funding is spread too thinly and, moreover, that the eligibility of youth councils presents something of a dilemma (ibid.):

*Policy in youth councils is mainly led by member organisations that are youth wings of political parties. There is an issue here of double funding, as I believe that youth wings should be funded through the Political Parties Act and not through this public call. However, the Youth Councils Act allows this funding. We have made a basic error here [in Slovenia] by failing to separate local youth councils and the National Youth Council from other youth organisations [ibid.].*

## Professional youth work and the quality of youth work

Youth workers bring together young people, the local community and educational institutions (Baldrige, 2018), promoting and amplifying the voices of young people in the local community, attempting to create opportunities for young people to become joint decision-makers within their community, and encouraging young people to take a proactive approach to their community and to society as a whole. Youth workers have a variety of profiles that correspond to the various forms that youth work can take.

Slovenia still does not have publicly accredited education or training programmes for the profession of youth worker, although individuals have been able to obtain a national vocational qualification (NVQ) for youth workers since 2017. The vocational standard was adopted by the Expert Council for Vocational and Professional Education (Strokovni svet RS za poklicno in strokovno izobraževanje) in 2016, thereby recognising youth worker as an official profession. The certificate awarded via the NVQ is recognised at European level, and quite a high number of education and training programmes are organised, mainly by national (youth) organisations, to further the development of youth workers' knowledge and skills. While youth workers can, with the help of different tools, place the skills and competencies they have acquired through their youth work 'on the record', there is still no national mechanism for recognising them. As Šarman argues: 'We have managed to get a national qualification for youth worker. On the one hand, this is fine, although I don't see that it brings any added value to the youth sector in this area. It would be better to have a strong, concrete programme at faculty level' [ibid.].

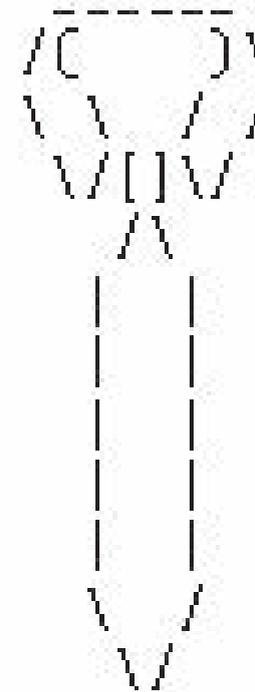
Youth workers in Slovenia can carry out their work either in the form of employment or as volunteers. Volunteers are frequently defined as 'youth leaders', and generally differ from professional youth workers because they have acquired their knowledge

(exclusively) through non-formal education. Youth leaders also generally operate within youth organisations, i.e. organisations founded at the initiative of young people themselves, while professional youth workers (also) work within organisations for young people, i.e. organisations created by adults in response to the needs of young people within society. Moreover, youth leaders are generally involved in the management of youth projects and young people, while professional youth workers tend to be involved in the coordination of programmes for young people as well (Beočanin, 2011, 66).

High-quality youth work must have a clear and comprehensive system for measuring impacts and recording results. According to the European Charter on Local Youth Work of 2019, the 'quality development of local youth work' needs 'regular and up to date mappings of local realities and needs', 'a clear and comprehensive system for documentation and follow up of outcomes', 'clear procedures for continuous updates on new national and international research, trends and methods in the field of youth and youth work' and, not least, 'continuous competence development of youth workers based on a clear competency framework' (European Charter on Local Youth Work, 2019). Only if youth work is of high quality can it have a positive impact on the development of young people and the local communities in which it is carried out (Brady and Redmond, 2017; Brennan et al., 2007; Devlin and Gunning, 2009). The establishment, maintenance and improvement of quality in youth work is only possible with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders: national governments, youth work providers, research institutions, educators and so on (European Commission, 2015, 15). The principles of (quality) youth work include: inclusivity and responsiveness to the needs, interests and experiences of young people; voluntary and active participation, engagement and responsibility; a holistic understanding of young people as capable individuals; the enhancement of young people's rights and the empowerment of young people; the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of activities together with young people; a focus on non-formal and informal learning; and clear learning objectives that are relevant to the young people participating (European Commission, 2015; Agdur, 2017).

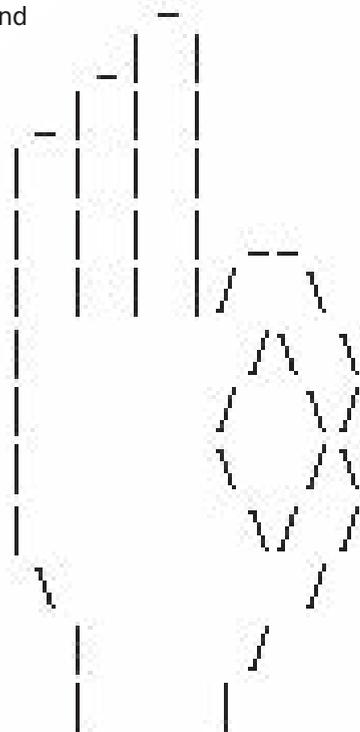
Slovenia has still not formulated quality standards for youth work, even though this is one of the objectives of the Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda in Slovenia up to 2027/2032. Public calls for the co-funding of youth work are already designed to secure funding for high-quality programmes, with a youth organisation being entitled to apply for funding if it has acquired the status of an organisation operating in the public interest in the youth sector. This status requires an organisation to reflect on its vision two years in advance, which encourages it to formulate and pursue a mission.

Research on quality youth work and the support environment for its delivery (Deželan and Vombergar, 2023) has shown that representatives of organisations that carry out youth work in Slovenia largely understand quality youth work to be that



which establishes a support environment to aid the empowerment and development of young people. At the same time, it must, in those authors' opinion, address young people directly and respond to their needs, wishes and problems, employ tools to record the impacts, respond to the social reality, and follow the principle of 'working with young people for young people'. They also stress that, if quality youth work is to be secured, youth workers must be provided with non-precarious or less precarious forms of employment, undergo continuous training, and have adequate spatial and infrastructural opportunities in which to carry out their work. The process of commodification, at play in this field as in others, is also having an impact on quality in youth work. Tin Kampl points out that many people are convinced that 'some [organisations] are increasingly providing youth work as a service with a corresponding less process-based approach' (interview, 19 May 2021). However, the purpose of a youth organisation should not be to provide ad hoc services or products, but to attempt to realise a long-term vision. This is easier to achieve for organisations that have a specific mission and a regular funding stream (e.g. the membership fees received by scouting organisations), while organisations that do not have such resources are, as it currently stands, mainly dependent on project-based financing, which means that they are obliged to adapt to the areas of focus of each individual call for applications. They are also often forced to adapt their mission by the requirements of those of their users who wish to use the education and training on offer to acquire specific youth work-related knowledge or skills, but who have no serious desire to remain involved in the organisation over the longer term.

The quality of youth work therefore depends considerably on the level of engagement of individual organisations, and on the integration and exchange of knowledge and experience between them. An important role is played here by the National Youth Council and the MaMa Youth Network (Mladinska mreža MaMa), which work to secure the ongoing development of youth work by organising events, education and training for youth workers with the aim of addressing the challenges that their member organisations have in common. In the 1990s, as the umbrella association of youth organisations at national level, the National Youth Council took part in key discussions around the formation of the youth sector, and introduced the term 'youth work' into the country on the basis of good practices abroad. By publishing manuals for youth workers and developing a pool of trainers, it helped lay the theoretical and practical foundations for the exchange of knowledge in the field. It set up the first training programmes that focused on quality in youth work, and made the establishment of high-quality youth work one of its core missions. It also acted as a basic link between organisations in this field (National Youth Council, n.d.). New organisations with the same mission began to appear subsequently, perhaps the most visible of them being the MaMa Youth Network, which was founded at the initiative of local youth centres. MaMa is a national (non-governmental) network of 50 youth



centres from different parts of the country that provides mutual support and a space in which knowledge and experience in addressing the needs of young people can be shared. Its mission is twofold: to place young people to the fore by promoting their active participation in society, and to improve the quality of youth work (MaMa Youth Network, n.d.). Maja Hostnik identifies human capital as the most important element of quality in youth work, but believes that the state is still not investing enough in it (interview, 19 May 2021):

*There is no concerted effort at national level to improve the quality and development of youth work. The biggest capacities in the sector are human capital, and nothing has been done on this for the last 15 years, or even more. You need to invest in and train staff. We have a lot of Erasmus+ trainings, but that's training for international youth work. What about the national, the micro environment?*

## Overview of the main themes relating to youth work

In practice, youth work means 'work by young people for young people or work to the benefit of young people' (Beočanin, 2011, 51). The practice of youth work needs to be set up in dialogue with youth and other stakeholders, transform aims and objectives into strategies and plans, define the preconditions needed for carrying out quality youth work, exchange information about activities and experiences at local, sectoral, national and transnational level, primarily inform, stimulate and support young people, and evaluate and ensure the visibility of outcomes (European Charter on Local Youth Work, 2019). The Office for Youth is the most prominent national body involved in planning, organising and carrying out measures in the field of youth work in Slovenia; it also supports these measures financially through public calls for the co-financing of youth work programmes. An analysis of the priorities and areas of focus of the public calls published by the Office (initially every year, but more recently every two years) gives us an indication of how some of the best-supported topics within youth work have developed over the years. The priorities of individual years have tended to be connected to national as well as international (European) social contexts and the public policy campaigns current in the year or period in question.

The focus in 2007 was on the Council of Europe's 'All Different – All Equal' European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation; this was joined the following year by a focus on the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which featured themes relating to intercultural dialogue between young people and to promoting the participation of young people with fewer opportunities. In 2009 the call prioritised the active participation of young people, youth information and counselling, youth voluntary work, the recognition and evaluation of non-formal and informal learning, youth mobility and youth research. Equal opportunities for and the social inclusion of young people, international youth work, a deeper understanding of young people, and health and well-being were the priority areas in 2010, followed a year later by a continuation of voluntary youth activities and the European Voluntary Service, transnational cooperation projects and participation in the European Year of Volunteering. The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations was a new area of focus for 2012, alongside Structured Dialogue with young people.

In 2013 priority was given to the employability of young people (in response to the economic and financial crisis), although the call also focused on Structured Dialogue

and active citizenship as part of the European Year of Citizens. In addition to employability and Structured Dialogue, the focus of the 2014 call was on programmes that addressed themes relating to the work of the European No Hate Speech Movement. Areas that contributed to the achievement of the goals of the 'Youth and society' section of the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 were also highlighted as priorities. In 2015 the call prioritised international volunteering projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme (European Voluntary Service, international youth exchanges, etc.) within the context of youth volunteering, while also maintaining focus on achieving the objectives of the 'Youth and society' section. The first two-year public call (2016/2017) prioritised the response to the refugee crisis, but also continued to focus on the achievement of the goals of the 'Youth and society' section of the National Youth Programme (as did the 2018/2019 call), while the 2020/2021 call was mainly concerned with responding to the topics of hate speech, radicalisation and the integration of young people not in education or employment (NEETs), and climate and environmental challenges in line with the premises laid down by the European Commission (the focus on the achievement of the goals of the 'Youth and society' section was also maintained). The 2022 call, for the co-financing of youth work programmes in 2022 and 2023, maintained the focus on the 'Youth and society' section of the National Youth Programme (whose period of validity ended in 2023) while also looking towards ensuring equal opportunities for participation in society, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities, and activities that are beneficial to society and constitute a response to the most pressing issues (e.g. hate speech, radicalisation of young people, integration of NEETs, etc.). The most recent calls (for 2024/25) add climate challenges to the topics highlighted in the previous call.

Since 2014 the Office for Youth's public calls for the co-financing of youth work programmes have been closely tied to the 'Youth and society' section of the National Youth Programme, which indicates a very clear awareness of the importance of public calls to the implementation of that programme, particularly when vertical youth policy is involved. Promoting the participation and representation of young women and men, the establishment and development of organisations in the youth sector and the development of key youth sector fields, providing conditions for the operation of non-organised youth, encouraging and strengthening involvement in international youth work and learning mobility in the youth sector, and promoting voluntary work among young people: all these topics have acquired a clear financial instrument, despite having already appeared as relevant topics in earlier calls. The priorities and areas of focus that have emerged in specific calls for the co-funding of youth work have played a significant role in formulating (and restricting) the operations of organisations involved in youth work, as those operations are heavily dependent on public funding. This coincides with the finding that if youth work used to be 'directed primarily towards young people's leisure activities, it has more recently become subject mainly to the need to respond either to the problems of individuals or to the problems of society' (Tea Jarc, interview, 20 April 2021), with sufficient funds being required for a high-quality approach to these issues. The thematic focus of public calls reflects a desire on the part of the Office for Youth for youth work to make a social intervention; during the major economic crisis, for example, youth work was mainly concerned with youth employment and employability. In Peter Debeljak's opinion, this was the central and key issue facing young people, and one that had to take precedence over other unresolved youth-related issues — issues that could be more easily addressed only

if young people had jobs. Debeljak says that 'if we have a good employment policy, then there is no need for a particular housing policy' (interview, 10 May 2021). He therefore identifies, within youth work, a systemic mechanism that addresses the major challenges that young people face, which in turn entails the transfer of the systemic problems of young people to youth work. Many see this as a problem, as they believe that the resolution of systemic problems is neither the core mission of youth work nor the primary task of the youth sector. Tea Jarc points out (interview 20 April 2021) that during the period of crisis

*[...] many institutions, not only in Slovenia but chiefly at European level, imposed responsibility for resolving youth unemployment on youth organisations and, of course, made this conditional upon receiving funds. This meant that the focus of many organisations that had previously not dealt with this topic at all changed, simply because this was the only way they could get funding. Of course, youth work should address the challenges of society and the needs of young people to a certain extent. But changing its mission because there are no adequate national policies, and shifting this responsibility for saving their peers onto young volunteers, is absurd. While youth work can also involve itself in policy development, responsibility for that cannot fall entirely on its shoulders.*

Maja Hostnik takes a similar view of the development of youth work outlined above (interview, 19 May 2021):

*In the last few years, all projects have been based on the conviction that we have to train young people for employment — that they find a job as quickly as possible. This has turned us away significantly from the focus and core mission of youth work. We carried out a lot of training programmes, but this was not backed up by concrete practice. Those responsible for publishing funding calls and giving out these projects are thinking in the wrong direction. More consideration needs to be given in future to the acquisition of skills and competencies by young people, not only through theoretical training but also through practice.*

Current debates around the digital and green transitions are also foreshadowing trends in youth work towards digital transformation and environmental protection. In addition to a strong emphasis on digital youth work, a significant shift towards young people's mental health can be expected as a result of the situation caused or exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As far as debates around the long-term trends in youth work are concerned, Barbara Zupan points out that 'participation' and 'youth dialogue' will become increasingly important topics within youth work: 'It is time for citizens to become aware of their rights and responsibilities, including the fact that their active participation is required in things that should lead to certain social changes' (interview, 21 April 2021).

## Challenges of youth work in Slovenia

'There will never be a shortage of challenges in youth work' (Barbara Zupan, interview, 21 April 2021)

The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting Within the Council on the Framework for Establishing a European Youth Work Agenda, which was adopted in 2020, highlights the challenges faced by youth work in Europe. One of these challenges remains the need for a common definition of what youth work is — in reality, the need for a common conceptual framework. It also highlights the importance of creating spaces for the delivery of youth work that are safe, accessible, open and autonomous, and this is indeed one of the main challenges in Slovenia as well. Representatives of youth work organisations highlight the fact that the premises in which they work are often cramped and unsuitable (with excessively high monthly maintenance costs), and do not allow varied activities to be carried out, or more than one activity at a time. They also highlight the major issue of securing the necessary equipment; in their experience, there is no suitable funding call that would allow the necessary or even basic equipment required for the delivery of youth work to be purchased (furniture, computers and the like). They point out that most of the equipment they use is donated or brought from home (Deželan and Vombergar, 2023). The reasons for the underdevelopment of youth work in Slovenia, in terms of premises and infrastructure, can be found in the low profile of that work and, more specifically, in a general lack of awareness of the positive effects it has on social life. Jurij Šarman puts this down to 'a tendency [in Slovenia] not to perceive youth work as important to the life of the local community' (interview, 14 April 2021).

The Council Resolution also points out that sufficient resources must be secured for the education and training of youth workers, which is a precondition for the delivery of high-quality youth work. In common with other specialised fields, youth work requires continuous staff development, particularly where it deals with current social issues; otherwise professional knowledge gradually stagnates, and becomes outdated and incapable of responding swiftly to young people's problems. If youth work is to be of a sufficiently high standard, investments must be made in research and development, and 'research should be carried out [...] but without creating unnecessary bureaucratic burden' (Council of the European Union, 2020), since only a data-led policy of bolstering youth work, either by studying the challenges faced by young people or by aiding the professional development of youth workers, will lead to the effective recognition and strengthening of that work. A further major challenge for youth work, in Europe generally and in Slovenia in particular, is cooperation between 'youth work providers and youth policy makers' and 'sustainable structures' (Council of the European Union, 2020), which subsequently feeds into problems relating to the funding of youth work. In Slovenia, organisations are often entirely dependent on project-based funding; indeed, according to Uroš Skrinar, this type of funding is 'frequently the only way that youth organisations can survive' (interview, 6 May 2021). It is a preservation tactic that means that youth organisations are forced to neglect their core mission. As they become increasingly performance-oriented (e.g. by having to deal constantly with HR matters), they are nudged further and further away from some of the fundamental principles of youth work. Representatives of youth centres and other youth work NGOs say that their operations are funded from a wide variety of sources: the EU, via the Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes



(up to 90%), local community funds (10–50%), the Office for Youth (5–10 %), calls for applications published by other ministries, and their own funds. Most organisations drawn on funds from all the above sources, and funding is mostly project-based and therefore only available for a limited amount of time (Deželan and Vombergar, 2023).

The method by which funding is allocated is also far from ideal. Šarman points out that 'if funding remains as it is, local youth work will not develop' (interview 14 April 2021). Given that youth work is always primarily local in character, he believes that it would make sense to involve local authorities more closely in the allocation of funding by allowing them to receive central government funds for young people on the basis of various set indicators, including the number of young people in their municipality. In his opinion, the current method of allocation heavily favours those organisations that know how to access funds and are proficient in doing so; it is not necessarily tied to the quality of the youth work they carry out in practice. Of course, we need to remind ourselves that the professionalisation of one field often leads to the professionalisation of others, and that such indicators can be biased. Some local authorities, for example, might have strongly developed services for young people outside of youth work, which means that even with larger numbers of young people, the pressure on youth work itself is not so great. The fact remains, however, that making the funding allocation process more local would bring that process closer to the local specifics of youth work in those environments, implicitly rendering it more effective. Considerations of this type are not new: indeed, when it was drawing up the Strategy for Youth in the Field of Youth Policy Until 2010 nearly 20 years ago, the Office for Youth recognised that

*[...] activities at local level [...] are increasingly dependent on funding strategies based on the 'top down' principle, which makes it impossible to plan for the long term and, in turn, leads to a fall in motivation, and hampers serious long-term planning and the continuity of operation of youth work. From the point of view of ensuring high-quality youth work in Slovenia over the long term, this is in no way a promising situation (Office for Youth, 2005).*

This challenge has long been acknowledged by political decision-makers and youth work providers alike. It appears that all that is needed is a common will among key stakeholders to regulate this field in a way that pays closer attention to the local needs of young people and, at the same time, addresses the systemic challenges faced by youth work, particularly with regard to its profile and professionalisation.

Precarity of employment is also a major challenge for youth work in Slovenia and one that is linked to the uncertainty that attends the funding of youth work. Precarity means that staff turnover is high, which has an adverse effect on the quality of youth work.

The challenge for youth work, in addition to establishing quality standards and providing quality youth work, lies in ensuring that it enjoys a sufficiently high profile outside the sector as well. In the opinion of sector representatives, it remains low, with little connection to and cooperation with the formal education system. Young people at school should be made more aware of the possibility of taking part in activities outside school; this would encourage them to continue to enjoy high-quality leisure time in these spaces even after they have finished their schooling. Youth work is facing the considerable challenge of how to reach different stakeholders and raise its profile by publicising its impact on and importance for young people, the local community

and wider society. Greater recognition for youth work would, in the opinion of representatives of youth centres and other youth work NGOs, lead to greater support for youth work at national and local level (Deželan and Vombergar, 2023).

Most activities, including a substantial part of youth work, moved online in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This gave further impetus to debates on the importance of digital youth work as a response to the spirit of the times, although these debates had already been under way before the arrival of the pandemic; it also set something of a trap for youth work by suggesting that digital youth work could be seen as a substitute for youth work that takes place through live interaction between participants. This is something Jurij Šarman is keenly aware of: 'I think that digital youth work can be very useful, but not the prevailing approach within youth work' (interview, 14 April 2021). This means that the situational development of one area of youth work has made it necessary to undertake a thorough reconsideration of the direction of development of youth work as a whole; and the fact is that while there is no going back, a naked acceptance of technological determinism will inevitably lead to ruin. Barbara Zupan believes that these changes will, sooner rather than later, result in the emergence of new organisations in this sector better able to make use of the new methods and address the new challenges of young people. It will be vital for youth work actors to adopt the mindset that 'youth work must not be static, but develop and grow together with the people and content that surround us' (interview, 21 April 2021).

The situation in which young people find themselves today, in this period of near-constant crisis, must be understood through the social context in which they live. They no longer view the future with certainty, as a promise or as something to which they are entitled, but as a threat (Galimberti, 2009, 21–22). It is therefore particularly important that young people have, at this time of great uncertainty and discomfort, which has social and cultural origins, a pillar of support through which they can find meaning and pursue their life objectives; and at times like these, youth workers and youth work can be among the most vital factors in young people's lives. However, without the adequate and necessary support of the state or public authorities, youth workers will not be able to provide the necessary support and encouragement. Supporting youth work organisations also means involving them to a greater extent in the policy formation process, as Tea Jarc points out (interview, 20 April 2021):

*This does not mean that young people merely find out about things through documents that have already been published, but that they are involved in the process of formulating these documents and of monitoring and implementing measures, i.e. their delivery and evaluation. Young people should therefore not have the role merely of observer or adviser, but be given greater opportunities to be part of the decision-making process.*

Policymakers, and not just those involved in the youth field, should be very concerned about the findings of the *Mladina 2020* study (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021), which showed that more than four-fifths of young people were prepared to move permanently to another European country if this would provide them with greater opportunities in life. Moreover, they were not prepared only to move to a 'safe distance' or another EU Member State: more than half would consider relocating permanently to another continent in search of better living conditions. This merely shows that we need youth work more than we think we do — not because this would create opportunities for

young people so that they do not leave for other countries or other continents to make a living, but mainly because of the extreme levels of despair that young people so obviously feel, to the point where they are prepared to make drastic adjustments to their plans simply in order to lead a decent life. This also creates a series of needs and mental states that youth work is perhaps more able to address than any other field, and probably why, given the numbers of young people who feel this way, youth work is more vital today than it has ever been.

## Looking towards the future

- Serious effort must continue to be invested in professionalising youth work in line with the general standards of occupational professionalisation rather than with the partial interests of some individuals and organisations. This should include all publicly accredited steps for obtaining and recognising education levels, sectoral qualifications and quality assurance systems. This could further the professional development of youth workers, improve the quality of youth work and lead to a recognition of the positive outcomes that youth work produces. In relation to this, consideration must be given to setting up formal education in the youth and youth work fields in the form of: (a) publicly accredited education programmes; (b) the systematic regulation of non-formal education for youth workers that complements formal education; (c) the upgrading of the existing national vocational qualification for youth workers and greater focus on promoting it.
- To ensure the comprehensive development of youth work, quality standards and guidelines, including the principles of high-quality youth work, must be formulated and adopted.
- To measure the achievement of the objectives of high-quality youth work, mechanisms must be put in place for monitoring the delivery of youth work in the qualitative (and not just the quantitative) sense, and for measuring the impacts of youth work. Research into the impacts on the community also needs to be strengthened, which means that relevant community stakeholders will have to be involved in obtaining this information. It is also important for youth workers to be relieved of the task of measuring the impact of their work, with experts and research groups being funded to perform those tasks instead.
- Youth work must be provided with adequate and stable funding for steady development of the field and the strategic development and professionalisation of youth work organisations. This should be established in such a way as to enable organisations that work with young people to follow their strategic directions rather than having to abandon them if they wish to meet the criteria of public calls and the demands of a particular priority.
- If the desired effects of youth work are to be secured and youth work carried out to a high standard, a support environment must be put in place that provides suitable forms of employment for youth workers, thereby enabling them to move away from the precarity that currently dominates the sector as a result of the short-term nature of projects.
- To secure the right conditions for youth work, steps must be taken to ensure that physical and virtual spaces for the provision of youth work are accessible to young people, and funding provided for the purchase of equipment to enable organisations to manage and carry out youth work properly.

- The profile of youth work must be raised if adequate funding is to be secured. This will also improve the image of youth work and help to overcome the prejudices that attend it.
- Youth work must be designed for young people above all. They must be involved at all stages of project development, including project design and the selection of the topics they wish to address.
- Better information needs to be provided to young people on the options and opportunities provided by youth work. This also means the establishment of more direct access to the wider youth population, which must be addressed via the channels they prefer to use.
- Youth work organisations must be provided with the opportunity to strengthen their capacities and upskill their staff through publicly accredited and high-quality education and training programmes so that they are better able to meet the growing needs of young people.

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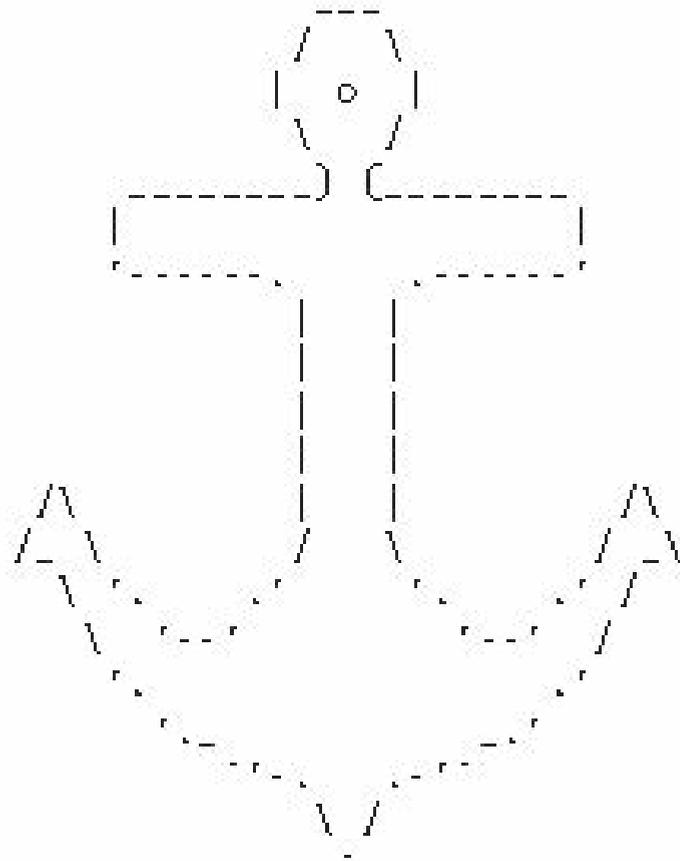
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## Council of Europe

Link is wrong.

Wheeler Agenda 2020

1982?

Development of youth policy in Slovenia.

Youth Sector Strategy 2020. x4.

## Early impact of the Council of Europe

co-management

youth info.

legislative regulation.

## National Youth Programme

adopted for a 9-year period

2013 - 2022 (started in 2009!)

Publications, including Mladine 2010.

→ integrated & cross-sectoral youth policy

## Diversity of youth sector entities

Youth organisations

National Youth Council of Slovenia

+ local youth councils

National Youth Council of Slovenia

Local youth councils

Youth centres

MaMx network.

Youth

**With** Youth

**By** Youth

**For** Youth

**Without** Youth

**No** Youth