THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE MODEL OF EU YOUTH POLICY

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In the last three decades the youth are in the focus of the policy makers ranging from local through national, reaching European and international level. While respecting Member States' overall responsibility for youth policy, the EU is pacing efforts to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market. It is also trying to encourage young people to actively participate in society. Sport is one of the main tools to approach young people. Despite all the measures significant number of young people are out of school and social life. The aim of this study is to provide a systematic review of youth policy and work, to define the role of sport and to explore the effectiveness of the respected policy. Qualitative methods of research were applied including content analysis, retrospective analysis and comparative studies. Sport is recognized as a key factor for youth development. We found a growing tendency for common governance of youth and sport, as well as overlapping in the related policy. In terms of structures we observed both subject specific and combined governmental and non-governmental organizations. The existing studies are showing greater association between youth policy and sport activities. Sport activities are considered the most attractive among young Europeans. More studies are necessary to explore the capacity of the cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation between the sport and youth policy. It is also necessary to develop new governance tools in order to enhance the role of sport in the model of EU youth policy.

Key words: sport, youth policy, youth work

Introduction

Young people are the present and the future of Europe and a rich source of dynamism in our societies. Since 1990s European youth policy development is receiving increased attention and is subject of interest of all European governments and on common EU level. It doesn't come as a surprise. Young people's human and social capital is one of Europe's greatest assets for the future. The European Union and its Member States possess a treasure in the potential of 90 million young Europeans (17,7% of the EU28 member states). Youth work is a polyvalent and multi-faceted practice. It takes place in a wide range of settings, varies from unstructured activities to fairly structured programs, reaches a diverse array of young people, touches upon many different themes and cuts across several other disciplines and practices. This versatility is one of the strengths of youth work, but at the same time it may lead to fragmentation and product vagueness (Verschelden et al, 2009). Youth work has always played a role in broader social and pedagogical strategies but in times of change there is a risk of instrumentalisation and youth work becoming a weapon for all targets. Moreover the deep social problems that many young people are facing get deeper and more serious. Based on our experience and documents data availability we consider that sport plays a central role in youth policy and work and is the most

appreciated tool for achieving multidimensional results.

Youth work as defined by Verschelden et al, (2009) is a polyvalent and multifaceted practice. It takes place in a wide range of settings, it varies from unstructured activities to fairly structured programs, it reaches a large diversity of young people, touches a lot of different themes and is on the interface with many other disciplines and practices. This versatility is one of the strengths of youth work. Young people grow up in very different situations. Youth work has the power to respond in a flexible way to this diversity. As for the youth policy Ashing (2010) states that there is no common, accepted, definition of what youth policy is or what it includes. Each country has its own national policy and decides what is to be considered youth policy. However, he made an attempt to define youth policy as the sum of all the initiatives aimed at young citizens, everything that affects young people in any way. This could be the result of youth policy today being spread across many different sectors and the large number of actors in the area. According to Denstad (2009) The concept of national youth policy has become well established in Europe. The European institutions of the Council of Europe and the European Union have become strong advocates for the development of national policies that aim at improving the situ-

ation of young people. They are pursuing different mechanisms for encouraging their member states to undertake measures to develop cross-sectoral holistic policies that perceive young people as a resource and which actively involve young people and non-governmental youth organisations in decision making on issues that affect them.

Methodology

For the purpose of this paper young people are considered aged 15–29 based on the Eurostat methodology.

Content analysis code models by Saldana (2011) and Grounded theory analysis by Sparkes & Smith (2014) were performed to explore the historical perspective that aims to identify the close links between youth work and policy developments and the place of sport in the broader social, cultural and political developments.

To collect data for this article we searched in the following databases: EUR-Lex; Eurostat; UNECE database and Eurobarometer surveys.

Results

Many young people struggle to find quality jobs which seriously hamper their path towards independence. In spite of a decrease in most Member States after its 2013 peak, youth unemployment remains a serious concern: According to Eurostat 8.7 million young Europeans cannot find work and the proportion facing long-term unemployment or involuntary part-time work remains high. As Europe continues to age, the historical triangular age pyramid associated with an expanding population has been reshaped, with a smaller proportion of children and young people and an increased share of elderly persons.

In Coyette et al. (2015) we find statistical data confirming our hypothesis. The most popular organized activities in which young people participated were those linked to sports clubs. Over one third (35%) of respondents across the EU reported having participated in sports club activities within the past year, while the next most frequent activity was being involved in a youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organization (22%). Participation rates for young people involved in local organizations aiming to improve the local community were lower (at 15%), followed by those active in cultural

organizations (14%) and non-governmental organizations (12%). A 2014 Special Eurobarometer on 'Sport and physical activity' confirmed that sports clubs were the most popular type of organization that young people joined. According to this survey, only 21% of young people in the EU aged 15 to

24 were members of a sports club; although an additional 6% of this age group were members of cultural clubs that included physical activities. The proportion of people aged 25 to 39 who were members of a sports club fell to 12%. By contrast, a majority of young people were not members of any type of club: 58% of those aged 15–24 and 70% of those aged 25–39. From the above numbers appear that a higher proportion of young people practice sports and physical activities more informally. This fact should be considered when developing future strategies and work plans. Another important aspect from this survey is that 64% prefer outdoor activities. It allows us to predict stronger future emphasis on outdoor activities which must be taken into account from our university authority.

From the EU Council resolution from 19.12.2009 in the period 2013–2015 we found that the Commission and the Member States continued working together, to improve young people's employability, their integration in the labor market, their social inclusion and participation. In the face of a growing socio-economic divide, the policy continued to tackle the deep social problems that many young people are facing. In 2016–2018, the cooperation framework for youth is aiming to empower more and more diverse young people, especially those at risk of exclusion. The target is to help them find quality jobs and participate in social life. In this most recent policy model sport plays crucial role in both – as a training tool for new skills development and powerful tool for social inclusion and socialization. There are number of instruments existing for this. EU funding under the Erasmus+ program complement the policy cooperation on youth work, volunteering and participation in democratic life. Other instruments, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), are providing funding targeted at the inclusion of young people in the labor market and at developing their human capital.

The Joint report for Education and training (2015) emphasize that the urgent challenge for education

and training across the EU is to invest and modernize quickly enough to realize youth potential. Experts recommend youth policy, operating outside the classroom, because it can also help young people acquire the right mix of skills to prepare them for life and work. Here again appears the central role of sport.

According to Youth statistical portrait (2009) excessive weight and obesity among young people have been shown to be significantly associated with long-term morbidity and mortality. Physical changes during adolescence may lead to weight problems (overweight or underweight). Furthermore in follow up of researching this issue Coyette et al (2015) presents that health is the main motivation for practicing sport. This shows that health motivation is well understood and gives another reason for including sport in the focus of youth policy.

Discussion

The share of young people in Europe is relatively low and they require special attention. Sport is essential part in EU youth policy. Participation in sport activities is among the favorites of young Europeans with clear preference for outdoor sport. This indicator should be taken into account when implementing the policy and designing of local activities. The outdoor sports might be the most effective way to attract young people in social activities.

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