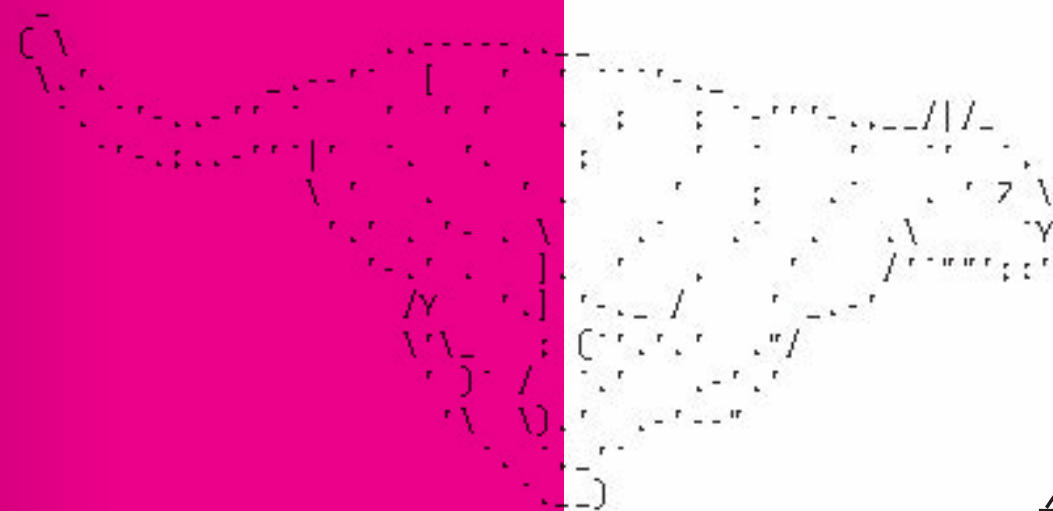


# Paper Tiger

The Development  
and Position of the  
Slovenian Office  
for Youth

**Andraž Zgonc**  
**Tin Kamp**  
**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 Baumkircher

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.

## References

- Criminal Code (Kazenski zakonik, KZ-1 – NPB11) (2008). Adopted by the National Assembly, effective from 1 November. <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5050#>
- Decree on Administrative Authorities within Ministries (Uredba o organih v sestavi ministrstev) (2003). Adopted by the Slovenian government, effective from 3 July. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED2949>
- Decree on Administrative Authorities within Ministries (Uredba o organih v sestavi ministrstev) (2015). Adopted by the Slovenian government, effective from 6 June. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED6985>
- Employment Relationships Act (Zakon o delovnih razmerjih, ZDR-1) (2013). Adopted by the National Assembly, effective from 12 April. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5944>
- Lavrič, M. and Deželan, T. (eds.) (2021). *Mladina 2020 : položaj mladih v Sloveniji* (Youth 2020: Position of Young People in Slovenia), 1st edition. Maribor: Univerza v Mariboru, Univerzitetna založba; Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021.
- Marriage and Family Relations Act (Zakon o zakonski zvezi in družinskih razmerjih, ZZZDR) (1977). Adopted by the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, effective from 1 January. <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO40>
- Organisation and Area of Work of the Republic Administration Act (Zakon o organizaciji in delovnem področju republiške uprave, ZODP) (1991). Adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, effective from 28 June. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO195>
- Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju, ZJIMS) (2010). Adopted by the National Assembly, effective from 12 June. <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5834>
- Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu za mladino 2013–2022, ReNPM13–22) (2013). Adopted by the National Assembly, effective from 24 October. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=RESO93>
- State Administration Act (Zakon o državni upravi, ZDU-1) (2002). Adopted by the National Assembly, effective from 29 June. <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3225>

