

Chapter 3

A Bit of a Mix

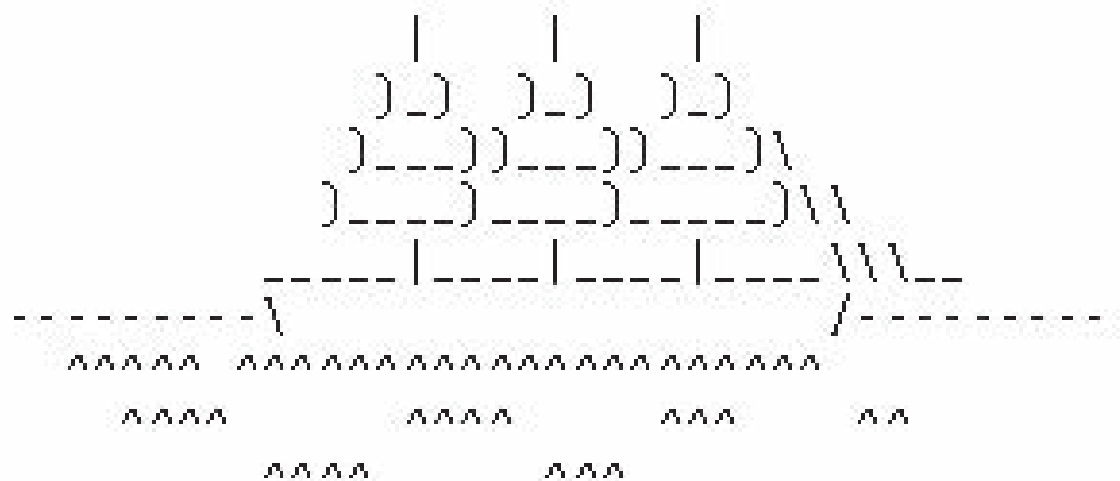
The Youth Sector in Slovenia

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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'.¹ 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,

¹ 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).² 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,

² 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,³ 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

³ 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 organisation: 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.

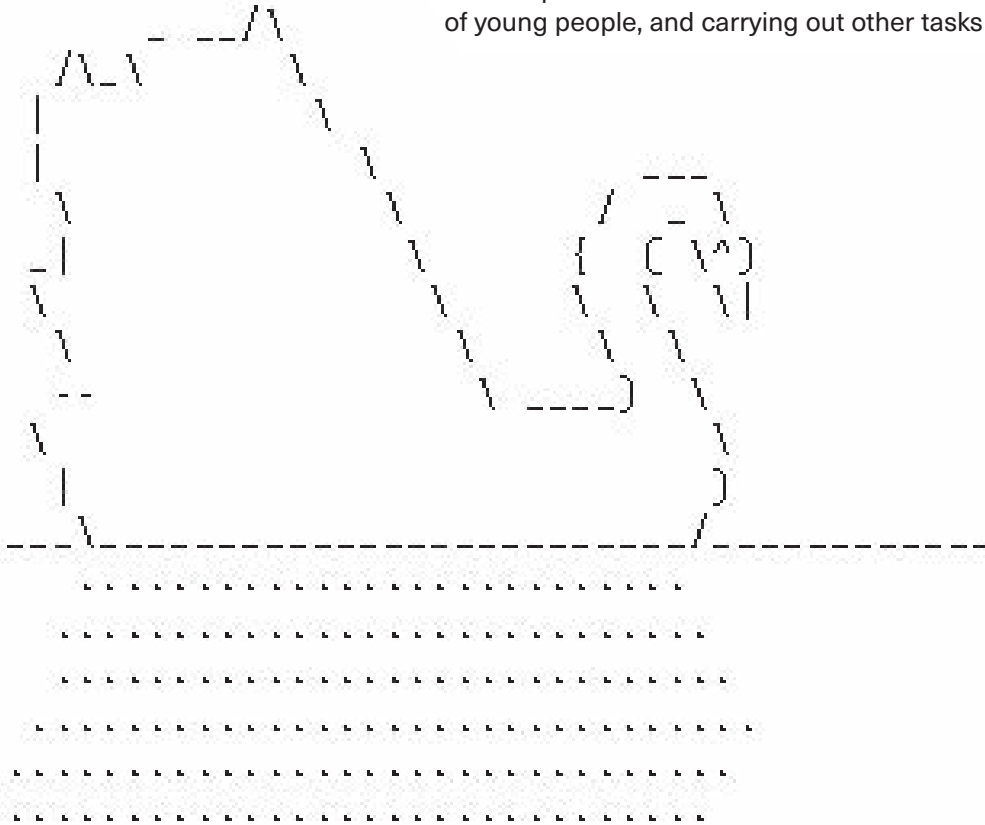
Most of the national member organisations of the National Youth Council began to be systematically founded at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, and were heavily influenced by the transition to the new, more pluralistic social and political system. The abolition of the Socialist Youth League 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

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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.⁴ 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).⁵ 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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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).

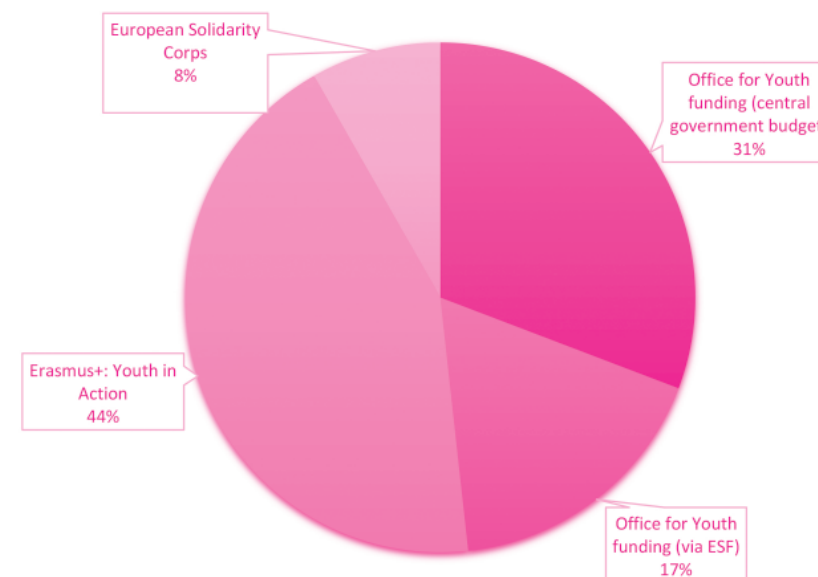
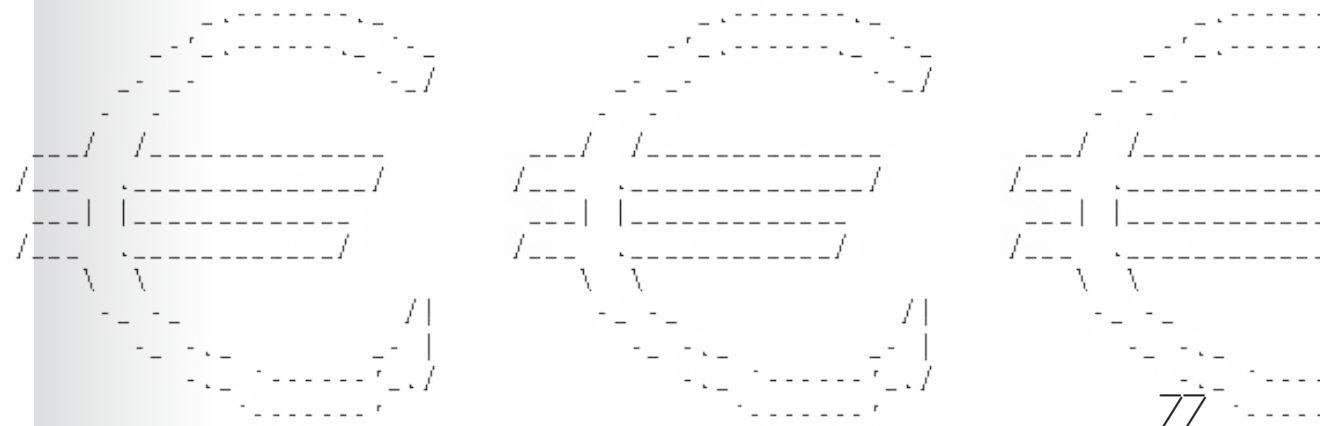
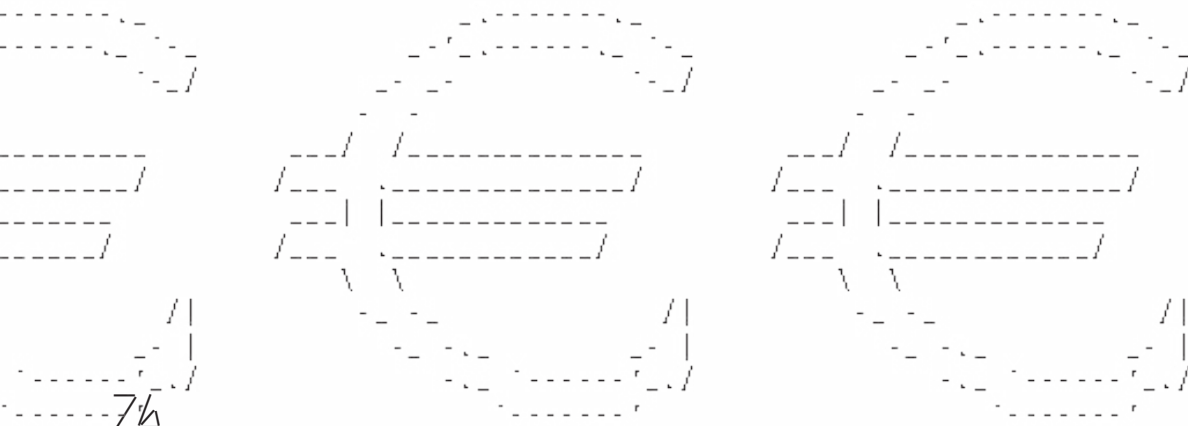


Figure 2: Structure of funds available for the youth sector 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on financial data received.

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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).



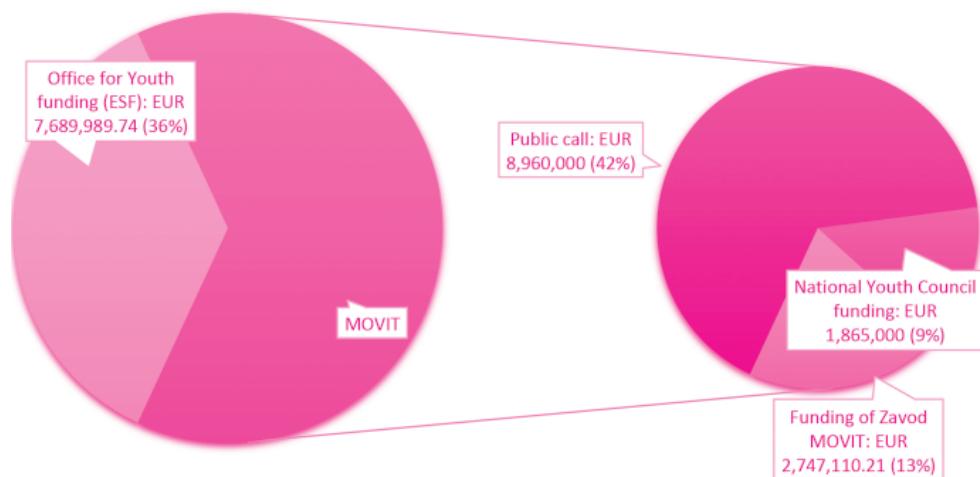


Figure 3: Structure of funds available to the Office for Youth 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on data received from the Office for Youth.

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%).⁶

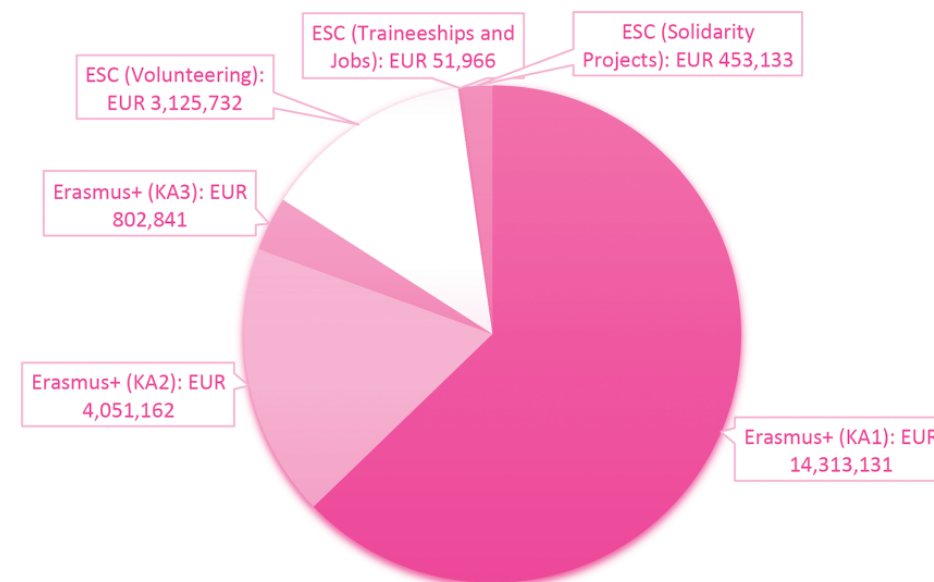


Figure 4: Structure of funds allocated under Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, 2014–2020. Source: Own calculation based on data received from Zavod MOVIT.

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).

⁶ 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).⁷

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

⁷ 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

