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Master's Degree in European Policies on Youth, Education and Culture

**Master's Thesis: "The Open Method of Coordination in
European Youth Policies: Evaluation of its
implementation so far and the challenges for the next
multiannual EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)"**

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I hereby declare that all the elements in this work have been acquired, edited and presented in accordance with the rules and principles of academic ethics and the laws governing research and intellectual property. I also declare that, as required by these rules, I refer to all the sources of all the information I use and which do not constitute my original creation.

Ioannis Tsilsou

Abstract

The present thesis has been written as part of the Master's Degree in European Policies on Youth, Education and Culture of the Department of International and European Studies of the University of Macedonia. The aim of the thesis is to analyse the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and how it works in relation to the European Youth Policies. The youth policies as a concept are introduced as well as the history of EU youth policies. In addition, different evaluations are presented about the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 as well as the OMC that the latter introduced. Finally, the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 with its main innovations is presented.

The thesis is based on the analysis of the OMC and the European youth policies produced so far, examining papers, scientific articles and European policy documents. It also studies reports, memos and evaluation documents in order to identify the challenges of the use of OMC in the European youth policy framework.

The results that have been produced will help the reader to understand how the OMC functions as a supranational governance tool of the EU also within the European youth policies. It gives insights and answers on how and to what extent the future European youth policies and the way they are governed can be sharpened to create a greater impact.

Keywords: Youth Policies, European Union, Youth Strategy, Open Method of Coordination.

Preface

I have been involved in youth work and in youth organisations since 2012. Youth work and non-formal education have changed my life, and I have become a better person. Since 2015, I am a full-time employee in a youth organisation, working mostly on youth projects funded by the European Union. The organisation is an active member of the civil society and a part of larger European networks. Through the years, I had the chance to take part in multiple European youth projects and events and be consulted for different EU initiatives about youth. Yet, only during my master's degree studies did I fully understand what the EU Youth Policies and the cooperation framework are. In addition, my involvement in the youth sector in Greece showed me that there is lack of information about the EU Youth Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination.

Therefore, by personal interest and having these in mind, I decided to write a thesis which would explore the relation between the EU Youth Policies and the Open Method of Coordination and evaluate the effectiveness of the latter.

Abbreviations

COE Council of Europe

CULT Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament

DG EAC Education, Youth, Sport and Culture' of the European Commission

EuNYK European Network of Youth Knowledge

EACEA Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

EKCYP European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy

ESC European Solidarity Corps

ESF European Social Fund

EU European Union

EVS European Voluntary Service

EYCS Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council

EYE European Youth Event

EYF/YFJ European Youth Forum

ISG Interservice Group

NA National Agency

NEETs young persons not in education, employment or training

NGO Non Governmental organisation

OMC open method of coordination

PEYR Pool of European Youth Researchers

REA Research Executive Agency

SALTO-YOUTH Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth

SEDEC Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture

TFEU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET Vocational Education and Training

YEI Youth Employment Initiative

YG Youth Guarantee

YS Youth Strategy

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Introduction

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was first seen in the 1990s in the Luxembourg process, yet it has been introduced for the first time as an intergovernmental form of soft law in 2000 along with the Lisbon Strategy. OMC has been redefined later in the Commission's White Paper on European Governance and can be summarised as a governance tool/framework of cooperation amongst the member states towards specific objectives, quantitative and qualitative goals, with the European Commission's sole role to coordination and surveillance. Therefore, through OMC, Member States jointly define their common objectives for a specific policy area, set specific indicators, exchange information and good practices and the Commission monitors the benchmarking among them. It allows member states to learn from the experience of the others and use a flexible framework of cooperation which is different from the traditional soft law mechanisms or the Community method. The OMC has been applied in multiple policy areas (which do not fall in EU's exclusive competence, respecting subsidiarity), such as employment, education, social policy and youth.

Youth policies are in the primary responsibility of the Member States, yet the EU also encourages and contributes coordination through specific programmes and specific policies, supplementing if necessary their actions (TFEU Article 165 (1 & 2)). Until 2001, youth policies in the European Union were moving around youth mobility programmes. In 2001, the White Paper on Youth was adopted. Through this, the European Union called on the Member States, through the OMC, to take action on youth-related policies, in particular to promote volunteering, mobility of participation and the integration of young people with fewer opportunities. The White Paper set out the European Union's youth goals for the period, and placed particular emphasis on young people's participation but also on education, as it is considered as a key factor in their development. The policies and guidelines referred to the White Paper were due to expire in 2009. However in between the European Youth Pact had been signed in 2005, which linked the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy for the first time to those of the EU youth policies, upgrading them in the political agenda of the EU.

The current EU's youth strategy was formulated by the Council's Resolution on the evaluation of the current framework for European cooperation in the youth field and on future prospects for the renewed framework. The EU Youth Strategy was agreed by Ministers in 27 November 2009 and it was set to run until the end of 2018, when a renewed one would be adopted. The strategy introduced an improved OMC, proposing a cross-sectoral approach setting both short- and long-term objectives and involving all key policy areas that affect the EU's young people. The Strategy also invited Member States to organise a permanent and regular dialogue (structured dialogue) with young people, which was indeed one of the main points of the previous framework's evaluation.

This essay contributes to the debate whether the OMC is an effective tool of cooperation in EU's policies, and more specifically in European youth policies. It questions and analyses if OMC should be a complementary action rather than a replacement of the Community method. It evaluates its implementation so far in European youth policies and the challenges identified by the stakeholders and experts on the field.

As a consequence, this proposal is mostly innovative in its core, as it deals with a key area of research of the academic community, namely the OMC, but also introduces the case of EU youth policies within its research, a subject which has not been much explored. Yet, the youth factor should be considered while formulating different sectoral policies. This is because youth has been acknowledged as a vulnerable and sensitive group, which has been affected a lot by the recent crisis in Europe (Guidi, 2014, p. 241).

The research methods used for this essay were based on desktop research; including studying of different articles, reports and EU documents. Interviews or questionnaires were not considered as necessary for bringing quality to the paper. This is because multiple evaluation documents were used by different sources and already conducted researches, consultations and memos by experts or individuals were examined.

1. Youth Policies then and now

1.1 Definition of youth

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1993, pp. 94–102), “*Youth is just a word*”; it is a social construction which is evolving based on social concepts, values and morals. It is a “*manipulation*” to perceive it as a social unit with similar characteristics at “*a biologically defined age*”.

It is a common ground that etymologies are transforming. As a result, youth etymology has also changed over the years and different definitions have been written in dictionaries. While in some societies youth state was always linked with age, in some others it was the period when someone becomes self-sufficient and capable of being responsible for others. Moreover, during the Middle Ages or other periods of time, youth did not exist or was not recognised as a concept, according to Philippe Ariès (Jones, 2009, pp. 1–4).

Hence, it is easily understood that youth is a concept that is perceived differently from country to country, in different cultures, societies or historical periods, and often does not only depend on the age, but also on different social characteristics. And in some cases, young people bearing specific characteristics or demographics may create their own subcultures, i.e. youth subcultures (O’Connor, 2004, pp. 409–410). Depending on different key actors, the youth status is easily constructed and deconstructed in the social field. However, many academic writers agree that youth is a “*series of transitions*”, i.e. *from family of origin to family of destination; from living with families or surrogate families to living independently* (Coles, 1995, pp. 4 & 8).

Even now, it is observed that different definitions across countries exist and even at the level of international organisations or the Member States of the European Union.

According to the UNESCO (2017), youth should be considered as the transitional period between dependent childhood and independent adulthood, and is a period that cannot be determined on the basis of age, as youth is a fluid concept. The United Nations, however, use the scale between 15 and 24 years, but their Member States in some cases consider someone as being “young” up to the age of 35. According to

some European Union documents and Eurostat, young people are those between the ages of 15 and 29 (European Commission, 2011, p. 3; Eurostat - statistics Explained, 2018), while European youth programmes (such as the Erasmus+ Youth) consider as their beneficiaries people aged 13 to 30, according to the programme's guide (European Commission, 2018b, p. 77).

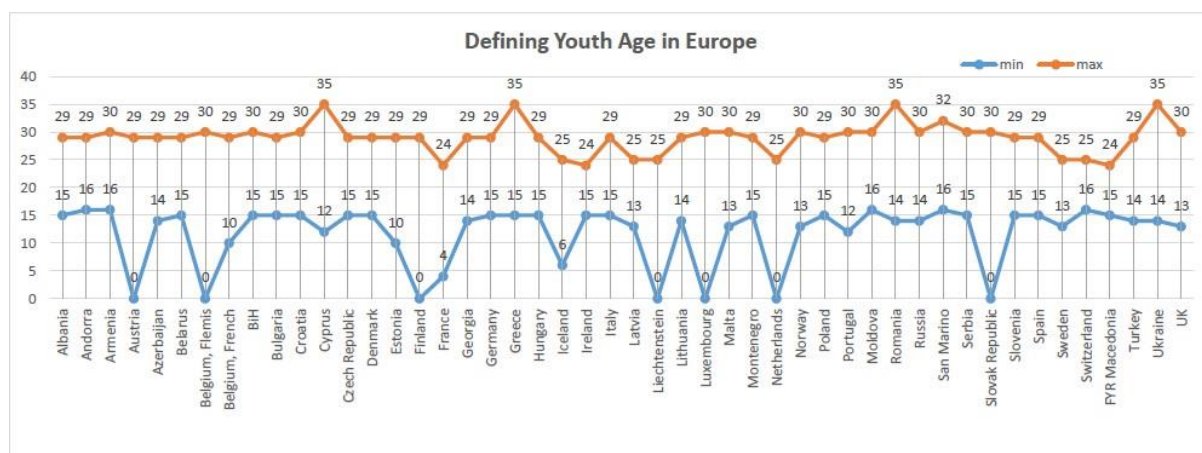


Chart 1 - (Perovic, 2016, p. 8)

Through this chart, we can also observe the different definitions of youth age in the countries of the Council of Europe.

In any case, the concept of youth as a social group needs homogeneity, based on social characteristics that are shared and are different from other age groups (Perovic, 2016). However, it is easily understood, even though definitions tend to focus on a more or less common age period, that young people do not share the same cultural, economic, physical or other characteristics (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 25).

1.2 From construction to the deconstruction of youth in politics

After the creation of the states, it was important for them to regulate different policies according to the age of their citizens. Therefore, the youth factor became an integral part of the countries' welfare system. It soon became a social category as such in welfare (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998, p. 63). Some other researchers place the creation of this category in politics during the period of *the passage from preindustrial to industrial societies*, due to labour market changes, the legitimization of life cycle, the industrialisation and urbanisation, the change of society's productivity, and the importance of measuring of time. A lot of changes took place that time across the world, such as the education changes that happened in North America and Europe,

the advancement and formalisation of labour conditions, and the better quality of life (Kovacheva, Merico, & Chisholm, 2011, p. 13).

Later, especially after World War II, western European countries showed a great interest in legitimising welfare policies or increasing the sense of social citizenship as a means of preserving rights to different groups. This was a way of giving powers to people to exercise their freedom and to enjoy equal opportunities in social life or welfare (Guidi, 2014, p. 242). According to Wallace & Kovatcheva (1998, p. 144), a focus of politics on youth has emerged that period due to different factors. Firstly as a prevention factor; societies believed that unemployment and economic crisis may lead young people to extremist politics, as it happened in Germany the previous decades. In addition, the youth movements and civil society improved and started demanding for their rights.

Youth policy in most cases is a field which is not much valued as part of the social policy at the national level of different countries of Europe. It is an area which has not been completely defined or regulated. Moreover, there is a lack of youth research. Different studies that exist do not pay attention to youth policies, or they approach them in a different way. In addition, they do not combine the findings of different cases; they tend to focus on specific countries. This is because youth, as explained earlier, is a concept that is perceived differently from country to country. It is observed also that although young people have been a field of research in the last decades, their own view is not much examined (Wyn & White, 1997, pp. 7–8).

However, before speaking more about youth policies, we have to define what this is. According to the Council of Europe:

“Youth policy is a strategy implemented by public authorities with a view to providing young people with opportunities and experiences that support their successful integration into society and enable them to be active and responsible members of their societies, as well as agents of change. It involves four dimensions referring to all aspects of young people’s lives: a. being in a good shape (physically and mentally); b. learning (informal, non-formal and formal); c. participation; and d. inclusion. Youth policy may combine different means of intervention (legislation, specific programmes, etc.) and integrates a long-term educational perspective. Youth policy targets all young people but should pay special attention to those who are

socially, economically or culturally vulnerable.” (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2015, p. 25).

All countries in Europe have adopted somehow a youth policy. This may have been developed and implemented *by intent, default or neglect*. This means that either they value the future of young people by proposing laws towards this direction, or they care but they don’t do much, or they do very little (Kovacheva et al., 2011, p. 135). The approach that the countries follow in order to regulate for a youth policy may vary *from regulation to emancipation, from prevention to intervention, from proactive to reactive, from problem-oriented to opportunity focused, from paternalistic to open* (Lavchyan & Williamson, 2017). In addition, different traditions, lifestyles, laws, and welfare systems exist in European countries. As a result, sometimes youth issues are regulated on the local level, other times a youth ministry regulates youth policies, and sometimes the latter depend on activities and initiatives of different actors, such as civil society organisations, youth organisations or youth councils (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, pp. 441–442). This creates problems in a comparative analysis of the different youth policies existing in Europe. By using typologies of the different policy regimes, originally introduced by Esping-Andersen’s ‘Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism’ in 1990, we can distinguish three major classifications, i.e. the philosophies of intervention, the target group and the development of the youth sector. Below in chart 2 we examine this classification, drawing from the analysis of C. Wallace & R. Bendit (2009, p. 444).

Model of youth policy	Countries	Philosophies of intervention			Target groups		
		Dominant image of youth	Major aims	Major problems	Target social groups	Target age groups	Youth sector
Universalistic model	Denmark Finland (Iceland) Norway Sweden	Youth as a resource	Autonomy Independence Development Political participation	Participation of youth	Whole generation of youth	13/15 to 25 years	Minor or no youth sector
Community based model	Ireland United Kingdom	Youth as a problem	Prevention of social problems Political participation	Prolonging of youth Social exclusion Participation of youth	Disadvantaged youth	Primary school to 25 years	Minor or no youth sector
Protective model	Austria Belgium (France) Germany Liechtenstein Luxemburg Netherlands	Vulnerable youth Youth as a resource Youth as a problem	Integration Prevention of social problems Political participation	Participation of youth Social exclusion	Whole generation of youth Disadvantaged youth	0 to 25/30 years	Major youth sector
Centralised model	Greece (Italy) Portugal Spain	Youth as a problem Youth as a resource	Autonomy Independence Integration Political participation	Prolonging of youth Social exclusion	Specialised groups of youth	15 to 25/30 years	Major youth sector

Chart 2 - (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, p. 445)

By analysing the chart, we understand the differences in the models that various countries might be using. It is important to mention that one important factor that distinguishes youth policies in the countries of Europe is whether young people have been seen as a *problem* or a *resource*. However, there are countries like Greece that see young people as a resource and as a problem at the same time. In philosophies of intervention in youth policies, it is examined who will be included in it. Age defines a lot; the target groups, the social status, whether a young person is with fewer opportunities or belongs to a specific social group. Moreover, differences in the way the youth sector works are major, as well as the model of youth policy, such as, for example, whether youth policy derives from the central government or is a product of consultations of the youth movement, etc. There are different trends on how youth policies also evolve during the years and if Europeanisation has helped the less developed countries (such as those of the South) to reach the more developed ones in this field (such as the Nordic and central European countries) (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, pp. 445–456).

1.3 Youth governance systems & policy actors

There is another distinction that researchers on youth policy make. This is about what kind of documents countries have adopted. The discrepancy here is that there are some countries that recognise youth within their constitution, others that they do it through a specific law or act on youth, and still others that adopt a certain strategic document or programme.

While investigating how youth policies emerge in different countries, it is important also to check who the youth policymakers are. This will show in some cases how high the youth agenda is for the political systems of the countries. Moreover, it will guide us to understand how the process works for them, how progressive or how youth-friendly they are.

According to the data from the meetings of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council (EYCS) and the Youth Wiki of the European Union, the following observations have been made.

Country	Responsible institution
Austria	Federal Minister within the Federal

	Chancellery for Women, Families and Youth
Belgium	Belgium does not have youth policy at the federal level. There is only jurisdiction on judicial youth protection. However, the three different communities of Belgium have each a ministry responsible for youth, several administrative departments as well as budget dedicated to youth. (“Youth Wiki - European Commission,” n.d.)
Belgium Flemish Community	Flemish Minister for Media, Culture, Youth and Brussels Secretary General, Department for Culture, Youth and Media
Belgium French Community	Minister of Youth and Equal Rights Minister of Youth Aid, Justice and Brussels
Belgium German-Speaking Community	Minister for Culture, Media and Tourism
Bulgaria	Minister of Youth and Sports
Croatia	Minister of Demographics, Family, Youth and Social Policy
Cyprus	Ministry of Education and Culture Youth Board of Cyprus
Czech Republic	Minister of Education, Youth and Sports
Denmark	Minister of Education
Estonia	Minister of Education and Research Secretary General for General Education, Youth Affairs and School Network
Finland	Minister of Education and Culture
France	Ministry of National Education Department for Youth, Non-Formal Education and Voluntary Organisation
Germany	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth At regional level, it is the ministries in charge of youth affairs and the youth offices. The ministries cooperate through the Conference of Ministers for Youth and Family Affairs (European Commission, 2018a)
Greece	Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs Secretary General for Youth
Hungary	State Secretariat for Family, Youth and International Affairs

Ireland	Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Italy	Ministry of Labour and Social Policies Department of Youth and National Civil Service
Latvia	Ministry of Education and Science
Lithuania	Ministry of Social Security and Labour Department of Youth Affairs
Luxembourg	Ministry of Education, Children and Youth
Malta	Ministry of Education and Employment Parliamentary Secretariat for Youth, Sport and Voluntary Organisations
Netherlands	Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports
Poland	Ministry of National Education
Portugal	Ministry of Education Secretariat of State for Youth and Sports
Romania	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Slovakia	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport
Slovenia	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
Spain	Minister of Health, Social Services and Equality Spanish Youth Institute Youth Interministerial Commission Due to non-jurisdiction of the central government on youth issues according to the Constitution, the Autonomous Regions of Spain have the exclusive responsibility in youth policies.
Sweden	Ministry of Education and Research
United Kingdom	Office for Civil Society However, the different devolved entities within the UK implement different youth policies and responsibility lies to different departments of their government, such as those of education.

Through this recording, we can discover which countries devote a ministry or department on youth issues. Moreover, in many of the countries, the youth policy responsibility is decentralised at regional, municipal or local level. Youth governance

mirrors the political system of the country, which is depicted in its constitution (Marina et al., 2018, p. 12).

1.4 European Youth Policies

At the European level, both the Council of Europe and the European Union have taken a lot of initiatives in the last thirty years for the europeanisation of youth policies. The Council of Europe opened a special Youth Department in 1972, which is part of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation within the Directorate General of Democracy. The department is responsible for developing youth policies, special funding programmes, as well as initiatives for the national, regional and European levels. Moreover, a European Youth Foundation has been created with two youth centres in Strasbourg and in Budapest (Council of Europe, 2018). The Council of Europe was striving for youth rights even before the European Union, and has shown a great impact in Europe. However, in this thesis, only the EU youth policies will be examined.

Both institutions through their mechanisms and departments encourage their members to introduce and maintain a youth policy. This is why both have developed a number of tools, guidelines, and books, which address policymakers, governments, civil society organisations, etc. Both institutions also have funding mechanisms for youth projects, youth organisations or structured dialogue. Since 1998, they also have created a joint co-operation programme, which runs till now. The EU-CoE youth partnership runs activities with three main priorities, a) participation/citizenship, b) social inclusion, and c) quality development of youth work. Through the years, this programme collaborates with several stakeholders in the whole area of Europe, conducting researches, creating publications and holding seminars (EU - CoE youth partnership, 2018). The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) is an online database, which works as a think tank on youth issues and is part of the programme. EKCYP aims at enhancing knowledge transfers between the fields of research, policy and practice through the collection and dissemination of information about youth policy, research and practice in Europe and beyond. As a result, EKCYP holds an expert database on youth policy and youth work, a library with important

resources for youth researchers, a glossary and a Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) (EU-CoE youth partnership, 2018). EKCYP is working the last 15 years as an online library and since 2016 it is one of the main contributors in the newly established EU Youth Wiki platform (Marina et al., 2018)

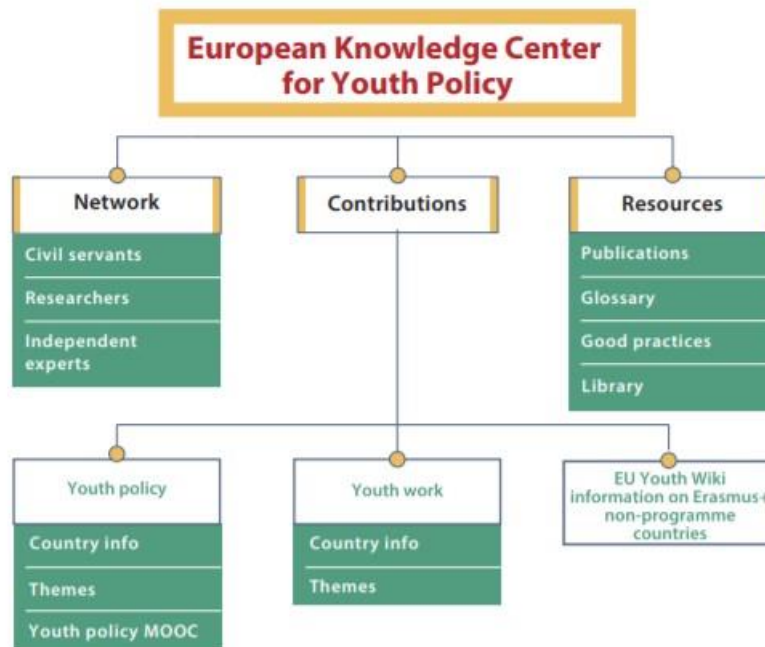


Chart 3- (Marina et al., 2018)

Through the above chart, we can see how the EKCYP is organised as well as its activities.

The database of the EU-CoE youth partnership and the resources available have been proven essential tools for the completion of this thesis.

1.4.1 EU Youth Policies

1.4.1.1 Legal basis and timeline

In the European Union, youth policies belong primarily to the responsibility of the Member States, yet the EU also encourages and contributes interstate cooperation through specific programmes and policies, supplementing, if necessary, their actions (TFEU Article 165 pars. 1 & 2).

It can be said that the Union has been interested in the rights of young people ever since its creation, putting the dimension of the mobility of young workers into the Treaty of Rome, Article 50 (European Economic Community, 1957). In 1988, for the

first time, consultations between the youth ministers took place exploring the possibility of establishing a European Youth Policy. Later that year, the Council of the European Union adopted the "Youth for Europe" programme (Council of the European Union, 1988), which was the first programme of the Union to promote voluntarism, youth exchanges and mobility of youth workers. It was implemented by DG XX11 (Education and Culture) during 1989-1991, with the second phase in 1992-1994, and a third during 1995-1999. This was the first pilot programme of the European Union that supported transnational activities for young people outside of the educational system (European Commission, 2009b; Wallace & Bendit, 2009, p. 453; Yrjar Denstad, 2009, p. 39).

The Erasmus programme is running since 1987. Other programmes supporting the exchange of universities, training and vocational education started in 1986 (i.e. COMETT, FORCE, PETRA, TEMPUS, LINGUA, IRIS, etc.), which later in 1995 were merged under the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Socrates also started the same year, in parallel with the third phase of the Youth for Europe programme.

However, it was evident that youth policies were a field where the EU had only a complementary jurisdiction, and not much was made outside the areas of education or employment till then. The Maastricht Treaty mentioned youth only in relation to education and vocational training (articles 126 & 127). After Maastricht, several other initiatives were released, such as the Directive 94/33/EC in 1994 for the protection of young workers, the European Voluntary Service programme in 1996, and Employment Youthstart (within ESF) (Geyer, 2013, pp. 1966–1969).

The legal basis for the youth programmes and the principle of subsidiarity were approved with Article 149 of the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. In 1999, the European institutions declared the necessity of a structured and coherent youth policy, having in mind the Social Agenda 2000. The Youth programme was established for 2000-2006 with the Decision No 1031/2000/CE, putting non-formal education in the centre of attention. Yet, the first and biggest step towards the creation of European Youth Policy was the White Paper on European Youth Policy: A New Impetus for European Youth (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, pp. 453–454).

A new era started in 2002. Until that time, as it was explored, youth policies in the European Union have been moving around youth mobility programmes and initiatives

supporting employment or education. Till the adoption of the White Paper on Youth, there was not any coordinated initiative about youth-related issues in the European Union. The EU followed years of consultation, both with Member States as well as with the young people. The White Paper also introduced the Open Method of Coordination as a method of cooperation among the EU Member States and the European Commission (Yrjar Denstad, 2009, pp. 32–33). It was obvious that this new policy focused on some post-modern matters, i.e. issues that the EU did not target before. Among them were those of the active participation and tolerance. However, with using very soft means, such as campaigns of information and projects, even though the Lisbon Strategy called for supporting youth in the different sectors with specific objectives (Guidi, 2014, p. 257). As a result, in 2005, when the strategy was revised, the European Youth Pact was introduced to propose the dimension of youth in other policies and the importance of inter-sectoral cooperation. The European Youth Pact reflected the Lisbon Strategy's priorities towards employment and the upgrade of the living conditions of young people. The White Paper on Youth had a sunset clause in 2009. However, in the years in between, the accession in the EU of countries with a communist background changed a bit the course of things. Many of them used to have in the past policies of intervention towards youth. Yet, since adopting a democratic constitution, they tend to have policies of neglect in many social policies (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, pp. 554–555).

In 2009, with the European Commission's Communication COM(2009) 200 final, a next big step was taken. The European Commission introduced the "EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities". Even by its title, "EU Strategy for Youth", it was evident that the EU wants to focus more on youth issues with a multiannual document which is based on a series of consultations and impact assessments. The strategy suggested the adoption of different initiatives or policies for the seven years to follow.

In 2018, a renewed EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027 was proposed by the European Commission, called "Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy".

1.4.2 Youth in different EU documents

According to Copeland & ter Haar (2015, pp. 8–9), between 1961 and 2010 there were 101 instruments in total that embraced somewhere the youth concept in the different EU documents. Such documents included directives, resolutions, action programmes and OMCs.

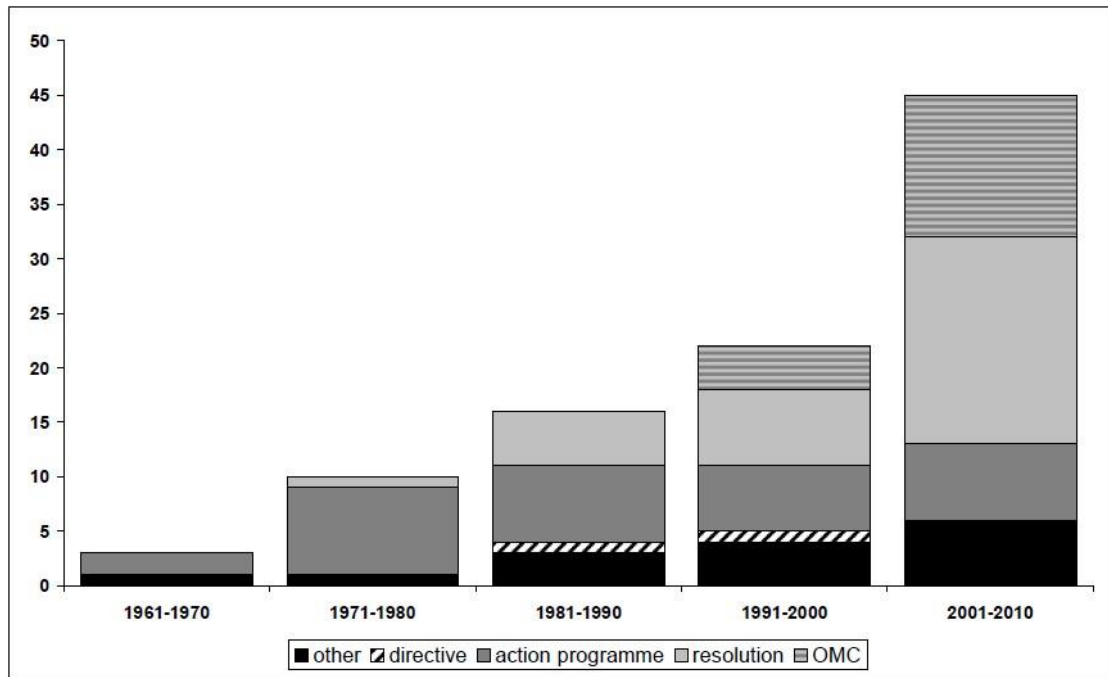


Chart 4- (Copeland & ter Haar, 2015, figs. 1-Figure 1: Number and Type of Instruments in EU Youth Policy Adopted over the Course of Time p. 10)

Through this chart, we come to the conclusion as before, that although “youth” is not a strange concept for the EU, it was rather marginalised till the end of the 1990s, when the White Paper on Youth was introduced.

1.4.3 The concept of strategy in European Youth Policies

The European Union’s political agenda is jointly established by its institutions: the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. The Commission sets priorities each year by creating a yearly action plan (European Commission, 2018h). It sets different strategic priorities for all the EU policies, as well as implements and evaluates them (European Commission, 2018j). Every Commission department also sets its own strategies according to the priorities set by the Commissioners. A strategy is a multiannual plan of the European Union. In youth policies, it takes the form of a communication or a white paper of the European Commission. According to the Treaty on the Functioning

of the European Union and the White Paper on European Governance, these form consulting documents, which may address the institutions or the national parliaments and are not legally binding (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a; European Union, 2016). A strategy also helps the Commission to keep track of a policy through one joint policy paper, which reflects its multiannual initiatives with indicators and actions.

By having the youth policies regulated into a strategy, it becomes clear that youth becomes part of the political agenda of the EU and that after its end, more will follow. In addition, the strategy sets priorities, propositions for initiatives etc., which are evaluated by a reporting system. Therefore, more data and information about the progress of the countries will be produced. Although the contents of a strategy are not legally binding, Member States feel the need to follow them and comply with its objectives, since many actors are involved and the process is transparent and open.

1.4.4 Units responsible for youth policy within the EU

1.4.4.1 European Commission

Youth Policies fall under the Directorate General ‘Education, Youth, Sport and Culture’ of the European Commission (DG EAC). This department is responsible for all the EU policies named in its title, and is under the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. The department runs also Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions programmes to support their initiatives and policies. These programmes are supported by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the Research Executive Agency (REA), which are part of DG EAC (European Commission, 2018f).

As of November 2018, the following is the organigramme of DG EAC:

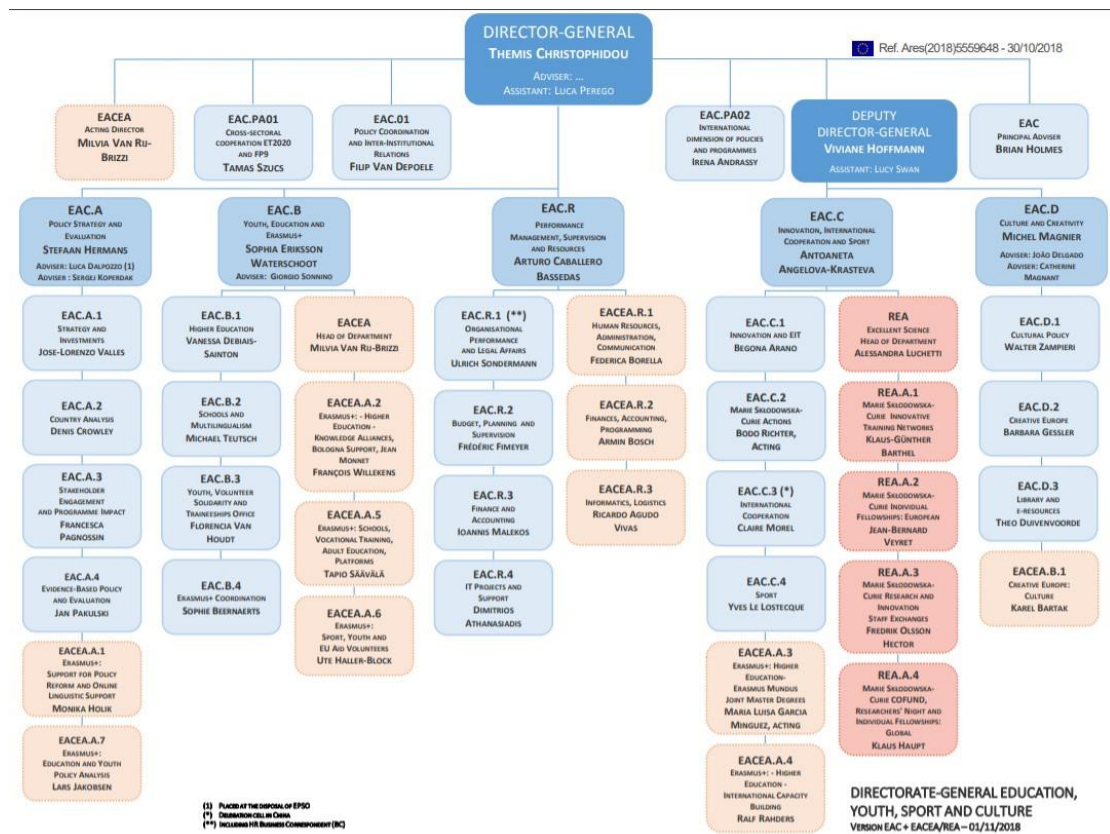


Chart 5- DG EAC Organigramme as of November 2018 (European Commission, 2018e)

In most impact assessments, the Commission and the relevant DG may create an Interservice Group (ISG), which is comprised by several members or staff of other DGs who are involved in some way or another in the EU youth policy (Commission of the European Communities, 2009c, p. 8; European Commission, 2017a, p. 43). As we can see also from the organigramme, there is a responsible person for cross-sectoral cooperation.

1.4.4.2 European Council & Council of the European Union

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (EYCS) formation of the Council is comprised by ministers responsible for education, culture, youth, media, communication and sport. The precise layout of the Council may vary, depending on the discussed topics or the particularity of the meeting (Council of the European Union, 2018a).

Under the Council, there is a Youth Working Party, which is responsible for the preparation of the items that need to be discussed by the EU ministers for youth (Council of the European Union, 2018b).

1.4.4.3 European Parliament

The Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament is responsible and gives opinions for policies related to education, culture, youth, audiovisual, sports, leisure, information and media, and cooperation with third countries in the above areas. Members of the committee are members of the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2018).

1.4.4.4 Committee of the Regions

The Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) of the Committee of the Regions is responsible for several policy areas, among others for youth, education, employment, social policy, social protection, multilingualism, the promotion of minority languages, culture and cultural diversity (European Committee of the Regions, 2018).

2. The Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is a process of regulation that the EU uses when it comes to policies that do not fall in its own exclusive legitimate responsibility. It is a form of “soft” law, which is much different than the Community method. It was first seen in the 1990s in the Luxembourg Process, yet it has been introduced for the first time as an intergovernmental form of soft law in 2000 along with the Lisbon Strategy. The OMC has been redefined later in the Commission’s White Paper on European Governance and can be summarised as a governance tool/framework of cooperation amongst the member states towards specific objectives, quantitative and qualitative goals, with the European Commission’s sole role that of coordination and surveillance. Therefore, through the OMC, Member States jointly define their common objectives for a specific policy area, set specific indicators, exchange information and good practices, and the Commission monitors the benchmarking among them. This method of regulation allows member states to learn from the experience of the others and use a flexible framework of cooperation, which is different from the traditional soft law mechanisms or the Community method. The OMC has been applied in multiple policy areas (which do not fall in the EU’s exclusive competence, respecting subsidiarity), such as employment, education, social policy and youth (European Union, 2018).

2.1 Characteristics

The European Economic Community was established having as a goal the economic growth and integration of the member states through the introduction of a single market. Under the circumstances and through the years, not much effort was made for convergence in other fields than those related to freedom of movement and economy. As a result, the European Economic Community, and later the European Union, did not have the competence or the legal basis to develop policies or strengthen its role in other fields where, according to the founding treaties, the responsibility belongs only to the member states (Prpic & Members’ Research Service, 2014, p. 1).

Since the early 1990s, the economic growth and integration of Europe brought many inequalities in the social field as well as unemployment. The EU and its members understood that there is a great need for more focus on social policies (Barcevičius, Weishaupt, & Zeitlin, 2014, p. 1). As a consequence, different processes have been used in order for the EU to regulate in fields for which it didn't have the exclusive competence. The OMC was used for the first time in the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines in the Maastricht Treaty with its article 98. Later, it was used in the European Employment Strategy and the Luxembourg process in the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 in its articles 486–502 (Szyszczak, 2006, p. 1). In 2000, it was introduced as a new governance method in the Conclusions of the Lisbon Council, where different areas of coordination were suggested (Lelie & Vanhercke, 2013, p. 13). The OMC was promoted as the only way for the EU to help the Member States transfer their competences in the difficult subjects that the Lisbon Strategy introduced, reaching long-term effects with their cooperation (Goetschy, 2004, p. 68).

The EU, being a *sui generis* political system, was using different types of soft law governance even before the introduction of OMC in the late 1990s to manage such policies. Other governance methods used are: a) the Community method, b) the EU regulatory mode, c) the EU distributional mode, d) the intensive transgovernmentalism, and e) the policy coordination (Vaughan, 2011, p. 14). Most of the researchers recognise that the OMC is a *new and different governance method*, meaning that it provides a particular methodology and approaches that do not resemble what existed before. However, it does not constitute an innovation per se, since different countries or intergovernmental organisations, such as the IMF or the OECD, have been using similar processes. The new element is that in the EU's OMC there is a multilevel interactive approach, requiring that all Member States as well as the European Commission participate actively in the process. It can be said that it is a form of cooperation or governance, rather than a legislative method (Büchs, 2007, pp. 3–5). It does not bring new legislation, only directions and guidance for voluntary regulations by the Member States.

Some claim that the OMC was a great profit for the EU, after the EU enlargements in 2004, 2007 and 2013, because sensitive topics could not find a way to be introduced in policymaking without reaching a certain political consensus (Lelie & Vanhercke, 2013, pp. 13–14). It has been considered as a *third way* and it has been

proved crucial for the further development and integration of the Union (Goetschy, 2004, p. 69). It has been described as a process that could be used by the members in order to develop themselves their own national policies and to learn by each other, and as a new way of governance between *intergovernmental negotiations* and *supranational governance* (Humburg & Arbeitsstelle Europäische Integration Freie Universität Berlin, 2008).

The OMC evolved through the years with the changes of the EU's priorities, as well as within the documents. This is because the EU is evolving as well. Meanwhile, the Commission and the Member States understand its drawbacks and seek to redefine it. For example, in 2005 the Commission issued to the Council a Communication called "A new start for the Lisbon Strategy" (Commission of the European Communities, 2005c), which changed fundamentally the strategy implementation due to huge concerns in coordination, and later the same year, a Communication called "A new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union" (Commission of the European Communities, 2005b). Through the second, the Commission evaluated the work done so far through OMC and how it can become better in the social inclusion policies field. As a result, the OMC was reinforced, and after 2010 the EU's role became bigger with the 2020 Agenda. This is because the OMC is now used more and more in the different EU policies. Subsequently, this boosts its importance (Commission of the European Communities, 2005c, 2005b; Prpic & Members' Research Service, 2014).

2.3 Where it is used and how it works

According to the White Paper on European Governance (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a) and the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000, para. 37), the OMC is designed as a *means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals* by encouraging the Member States to develop their own policies. The areas where the OMC is particularly working are those which the EU does not have the exclusive competence and are so sensitive that a common agreement with the governments needs to be reached. The OMC is introduced and monitored by the European Commission through a procedure which is evolving through the years and is used *case by case*.

Therefore, there are different OMC approaches and not a single one, depending also on the area where these approaches are implemented. Even though the OMC was initially built mostly for the social policy field, its widespread use applied also to policies such as social inclusion, innovation, information society, research, immigration, pensions, etc. The OMC approaches that have been used so far vary in length, methodology, the level of involvement of the EU, and more (Prpic & Members' Research Service, 2014, p. 2).

The approach that the European Union is using through the OMC can be summarised as the following table.

Main steps in setting-up the OMC process.	
Step 1 – Introduce the idea of OMC and start the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trigger the process - Provide overall political guidance
Step 2 – Set common objectives and guidelines, benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set guidelines, objectives, quantitative targets, benchmarks, indicators - Give recommendations
Step 3 – Turn guidelines into action plans/mutual information exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop national action plans - Use information exchange and expert deliberation in working groups
Step 4 – Compare and evaluate plans, define best practises, produce a joint report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare and evaluate national plans and produce a joint report - Use learning mechanisms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ identify best practises and exchange information ○ use external peer review and committee peer review and deliberation ○ benchmarking
Step 5 – Decide on follow-up, implementation, review basic guidelines, and assess results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement recommended measures - Start a new policy cycle

Chart 6 - Main steps in setting-up the OMC process (Pülzl & Lazdinis, 2011, p. 413)

The European Commission, along with the Heads of States within the European Council, set some guidelines, objectives and goals for a specific topic they need to address. The Commission in most cases brings to the table results of consultations with experts, stakeholders and interest groups on the matter in order to trigger the interest of the Council. A common timetable for reaching those goals is discussed, as

well as quantitative and qualitative indicators based on the needs of the Member States and benchmarks. Benchmarking is an important element of the whole procedure and is considered as a core activity. This set of guidelines, timetables and indicators, in some occasions (like the youth policy), form a common multiannual strategy, a strategic document of the European Union which states all these ‘intentions’ with recommendations for the member states. These guidelines and/or recommendations should be implemented by the Member States through Action Plans that they develop. The action plans and their implementations are evaluated, as well as good practices are exchanged among the members and the Commission. The results are compared and feedback is provided. The Commission has an active coordinating role. However, the European Parliament is also informed, and gives feedback on the procedure and its results. The other EU institutions may also issue an opinion depending on the field. Throughout the process, the Commission has less power in OMC than in the Community method, as state governments regulate their actions or produce the documents (Büchs, 2008, p. 12). All documents and results are open and the goal is that the Member States learn from the good practices of the others, as well as they are named and shamed in case they don’t work much on an issue. This whole process is voluntary and depends exclusively on the Member States. In many occasions, the Member States might change their laws or introduce national/regional policies based on the common goals set, or others might only have a passive role and converge into a minimum standard. A joint report is produced and members decide for a follow-up, further actions, and measures on the results of the recommendations; thus a new cycle of OMC begins (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a; European Council, 2000; Pülzl & Lazdinis, 2011).

As it is understood, the OMC is a multilevel governance tool, where Member States have the biggest role. The tools that are used are consultations from stakeholders, non-binding guidelines with timetables for reaching the objectives, National Action Plans, and regular monitoring from the Commission, assessing the achievements of the Member States. Throughout the cycle, there might be meetings of the Ministers or responsible authorities for the specific policies in order to discuss the next steps. Expert groups might also be formed to provide feedback to the EU institutions. The OMC in most cases is followed by a funding programme of the EU that supports the collaboration amongst the Member States in order to reach the goals

set (such as the Erasmus+ for the Education, Youth and Sports) (Behning, 2003, p. 737) (Büchs, 2007, p. 6).

Having described the process, some of the benefits of the OMC (adding to those already stated) is that it has a great flexibility. It is voluntary (there is no formal constraint) for the Member States and depends on their own needs and ‘translation’ of the guidelines. The process should fit all Member States without pressuring them on matters on which they do not want to legislate. On the other hand, the countries are peer-pressured sometimes, which is good for the stakeholders, interest groups and the European Commission that wants the EU as a whole to progress and reach cohesion in certain areas. The process can be described as a “pool of knowledge” and good practices. The countries, therefore, are learning how other countries have developed their policies, taking examples for their own case. It is decentralised, which respects the general principle of subsidiarity in the EU. However, the OMC has opened a big discussion on whether it is beneficial overall for the EU, whether it actually reaches convergence or reform, whether actions can be efficiently done without binding legislation, if the process is too complex to follow, and if there are real results in the end (Dehousse, 2003, pp. 3–8).

Some supporters of the OMC embrace the view that it is a participative method in shaping future policies, as it involves different stakeholders and policymakers, contributing in a way to the bridging of the democratic deficit of the EU. The interest groups take part by giving feedback and opinion, and shape together with the other actors the guidelines, views and opinions. The OMC can lead to “better regulation” as well as “effective regulation”. As it is evolving, we can say that it is still experimental in a way, and it has received great criticism. Some of the criticism is about its weak performance, its lack of efficient tools of reform, the lack of coordination and the finding of solutions (Szyszczak, 2006, pp. 496–502).

It is evident that the ‘one size fits all’ doesn’t work all of the times, as the differences among the countries, especially in some areas, are big. Moreover, countries are not always willing to participate with great devotion in it, and as a consequence, there are not tangible results most of the times. This has become even more evident after the enlargement of the EU and the financial crisis which has hit many countries in Europe. Countries tend neither to identify common solutions nor to

agree on specific objectives. Moreover, the National Action Plans are not taken seriously by the Member States. They favour becoming a bureaucratic process that Member States follow in order to “show off” their commitment or to gain attention by their citizens, rather than to conform to the key ambitions of the EU in a policy area. Besides, the peer-to-peer review does not work the way it was designed to, as the time is limited for the countries to evaluate and reassess. Proportionately, the European integration might, critics predicate, be in danger, while euroscepticism is high. The horizontal approach is not always working. The motive behind OMC does not correspond to the reality, and in due course, the OMC may surpass the use of the Community method, as the OMC does not require members to hand further sovereign rights to the EU (Song, 2011, pp. 21–24).

There have been also critics inside the EU, such as the European Parliament, whose role in the OMC is very limited, and it has expressed its distress on the process. It is true that the European Parliament is the only elected body in the EU and has raised many concerns, along with the European Economic and Social Committee, that both warn about the inefficient results it produces or the lack of parliamentary and judicial involvement (Prpic & Members’ Research Service, 2014, p. 2).

3. The OMC in European Youth Policies

The OMC as described is used in a number of policies, with youth being one of them. It was introduced in 2001 with the White Paper on Youth by the European Commission (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b). Youth policies are a primary responsibility of the Member States, and this is one of the reasons that the European Union did not show much progress during the years. The OMC in youth was decided to be used the same period with the Lisbon Strategy (Kovacheva et al., 2011, p. 127).

3.1 From the White Paper to the EU Youth Strategy

Despite the fact that there have been attempts of the EU to create a common youth policy in the past, the White Paper was one of a kind. This is because it was the first multiannual youth policy of the European Union that introduced other topics in youth policy and proposed the continuity of the youth programmes, such as the European Voluntary Service, which has been perceived as one of the most successful programmes of the EU. Moreover, it introduced the OMC as a method of *transversal and intersectoral cooperation* amongst the Member States. The benchmarks and the priorities which were set were very ambiguous. However, they were a very good step towards a coherent European youth policy. Through the White Paper, Member States had as a requirement to send their report to the European Commission towards their progress on the guidelines set (Wallace & Bendit, 2009, p. 454).

The plan that the European Commission proposed for the OMC, as drawn from the White Paper, is the following:

- Acting on a proposal from the Commission, the Council of Ministers periodically decides on priority areas of common interest.

- Each Member State appoints a coordinator, to act as the Commission's interlocutor, for youth-related issues. The various coordinators submit to the European Commission details of policy initiatives, examples of best practice and other material for consideration on the chosen topics.

- *The European Commission submits a summary and an analysis of this information to the Council of Ministers, accompanied by proposals for common objectives.*

- *The Council of Ministers sets out common guidelines and objectives for each of the topics and lays down monitoring procedures, and where appropriate, benchmarks based on indicators.*

- *The European Commission is responsible for periodic monitoring and evaluation, and reports on progress to the Council of Ministers for Youth.*

- *The European Parliament must have an appropriate role in this process and in the monitoring arrangements. The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also have to have the opportunity to give an opinion.*

- *Young people are consulted on the priority themes and on their follow-up.*

- *Applicant countries are associated as far as possible (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b, Chapter 4.1.1.).*

The OMC in the youth field seemed to be a bit different than the ones initiated in other policy areas. First of all, there was no quantitative indicator. As it is evident by the above plan, as well as the section “4.1.2. *The scope for action using the open method of coordination in the youth field*”, the Commission only proposed what would be good to be done without a timeframe, neither the proposal of a National Action Plan. However, it is important to mention that one of the priorities that were set was the youth dimension in other policy areas. This introduced somehow the concept of cross-sectoral cooperation (Rahja & Sell, 2006, p. 6). This was also one of the notes of the Council’s Resolution (Council of the European Union & Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2002), where it also established that the OMC should be very flexible. Young people and their associations take part in it without any discrimination. The OMC in the youth field finally commenced in July 2002. The Council also called the Commission to send questionnaires to the Member States, and also to prepare reports and consult on its movements the European Youth Forum and other relevant stakeholders.

The first assessment of the OMC in youth policies came with the Communication of the Commission to the Council (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). The Commission reassured the Council that all the undertakings of the Commission have been so far achieved and mentioned the progress in each of the priorities. Moreover, it found important to find a balance between the method's flexibility and effectiveness, as it is essential more and effective actions to be taken by the Member States. In addition, specific measurable indicators should have been set, young people should take a more active role in the shaping of the policy, and finally the Member States should draw an action plan, which is based on the objectives set.

As stated before, the OMC is an evolving organism, which works as a project cycle that is evaluated and reinforced during its implementation, and this was visible since the first years of its implementation. In 2005, a revised Lisbon Strategy was adopted by the European Commission (Commission of the European Communities, 2005c), and the European Youth Pact (2005) was introduced by the Council. The European Union with the revised Lisbon Strategy had as an aim to make the Union *the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010*. Therefore, it was evident that it should have also focused on the youth dimension. The European Youth Pact seemed as a response to the demographic change, and along with other policies it included the fields of employment, social cohesion, education, training, mobility, as well as family and professional life (Kovacheva et al., 2011, p. 139). The Youth Pact suggested 3 points of interest: the youth dimension in other sectoral policies, the use of the OMC, and the importance of the youth factor, especially in growth and jobs. It included an impact assessment as an annex to the communication of the Commission (Commission of the European Communities, 2005a).

Meanwhile, it introduced and strengthened the importance of structured dialogue with young people, which has been used ever since as part of the OMC in youth policies. Therefore, it invited the Commission, the Member States, as well as their organisations, researchers in the youth field and policymakers, to engage in a dialogue, which can be on different topics that address young people (Council of the European Union, 2005). Structured Dialogue on Youth is an action that facilitates the dialogue between young people and policymakers. Through this mechanism, discussions take place on a regular basis based on a structured cycle where youth

representatives and decision-makers take part. Every cycle lasts 18 months and involves a Trio Presidency under a specific political priority, which should evolve into a Council resolution. Different actors take part in this process in order to be as much inclusive as possible. As a result, National Working Groups are created in each country, where young people, youth organisations and National Youth Councils take part in a dialogue. Other consultations might also take place at all levels. Later, National Youth Councils, International NGOs and the European Youth Forum, along with many young people from all over Europe, take part in a Youth Conference held by the Presidency of that time, every six months (European Youth Forum, 2018d; Youth for Exchange and Understanding, 2014).

Structured dialogue was further supported by the Council's Resolution of 26 October 2006 (Council of the European Union, 2006). More concrete steps were introduced, as well as the different subjects of the cycles of dialogue. Furthermore, the Council called the Commission and the Member States to use the budget of the Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013) to finance further decentralised projects of structured dialogue (Council of the European Union, 2006). As a result, one of the actions of the Youth in Action programme was the "Action 1.3 - Youth Democracy Projects" (European Commission, 2013, p. 48). Structured dialogue projects run by youth organisations are now financed by of the Erasmus+ Youth Programme (2014-2020) under Key Action 3 Support for Policy Reform (European Commission, 2018g, p. 194).

3.1.1 Evaluation of the White Paper by the European Youth Forum

In 2006, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) issued an Evaluation study of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field, which was prepared and conducted by the Finnish Youth Research Society. This study had been a very good first insight about how OMC works within youth policies of the EU. It included a survey in which both members of the civil society organisations took part (such as youth organisations, youth councils, networks of organisations), as well as institutions (national ministries, the European Commission, etc.) and researchers. Therefore, the objectives of the research were to examine how the OMC is perceived by different actors and whether young people have been involved in it and in what way. The results of the research were both quantitative and qualitative (Rahja & Sell, 2006, p. 3).

The report further mentioned that that through the White Paper, the EU seemed for the first time standing as a “*partner*” to young people, defending their rights and asking about their opinion in a constant dialogue (2006, p. 7). Although the OMC and European governance were introduced, it looked from the findings of the research that governments, civil society actors or stakeholders were not so familiar with it. Meanwhile, there was not much information about how the process was done, unless if someone asked for from the relevant ministry. The availability of information altered from country to country but in most cases, young people, youth organisations or youth councils were not aware of the White Paper and the OMC at all. And this was for sure a reason to be sceptical. The OMC was meant to increase the participation of the youth in political and social life, as well as in youth policies after all (2006, pp. 13–17). Thus, one of the main points should have been that there was a more bottom-up transfer of experience, as well as the ministries to inform the national and local actors about the process (2006, p. 19). This was because young people are somehow excluded at the end of the process.

The method seemed to give Member States the freedom to develop their youth policies on their own and mutually learn from the good practices of the others. This might be considered also as a deficiency of the process, as the policies are in the hands of the governments. Not all governments were willing to progress; neither did they follow a specific communication strategy for consultations with the stakeholders, evaluation, etc. (2006, p. 38).

However, the OMC and the process it followed gave somehow popularity to youth policies and youth work. This was important for that time, as public confidence was quite low towards the EU institutions. Yet, it seemed that much more effort should have been done by the ministries for the inclusion in the process of the young people and their representatives, as well as for access to information. Therefore, a more comprehensive plan for the increase of participation was very much important. Moreover, through the research, it became evident that indicators to be set were of high essence in order to reach tangible results, as well as assessment tools to be introduced for reporting the progress of the Member States. This was mentioned mostly by the youth organisations, while ministry actors did not agree on that (2006, pp. 39–40).

The study closed by mentioning that further investigation should be done on the functioning of the OMC in the youth policy, as this method is also new in this field. The key points of improvement, as mentioned above, were the transparency, the wider participation of young people as well as their representatives, the initiation of indicators, the sharing of information, the further dissemination and use of the youth portal created by the Commission, and the democratic approach to policymaking (2006, pp. 41–42).

The EU Youth report & consultation for the next framework

In 2009, the Commission published the first EU Youth Report (European Commission, 2009d). As it was mentioned also in the Introduction, this report was the first attempt of the Commission to publish a compilation of statistics and figures, and to illustrate this way the life of young people in Europe, their challenges, problems, etc. This report was also a requirement of the White Paper, and it was requested by the Council in its 2006 resolution. The Commission, through this report, wanted also to show the way to a new European framework in the youth field, which would also be based on facts and research data. The report showed where the new youth policies should focus, and was also based on the European Research on Youth (Directorate-General for Research Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities & European Commission, 2009), which was a compilation of information about different youth projects funded by the European Union as well as policy data. The sources that the report used also came from Eurostat statistics, surveys and reports of the European Union and the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCYC). (European Commission, 2009c, pp. 7–8).

The year of 2009 was a milestone year for European youth policies. First of all, it marked the end of the plan of the White Paper on Youth. As a result, there was a movement from the different institutions to prepare documents and impact assessments, as well as to evaluate the cooperation framework in the youth field. It can be also considered as a turning point for Europe, as the crisis had recently started showing some of its results. As a consequence, the condition of young people, as it was proved later, would be worsened in many countries of Europe. Youth policies, therefore, were then more necessary than ever. In April 2009, Commission adopted the new EU Youth Strategy on "Youth - Investing and Empowering" which was

accompanied by a wide consultation, which took place the years prior to it (Guidi, 2014, pp. 246–248).

The consultation was conducted with two target groups, youth policy experts and young people, but also Member States took part in some forms of it. The aim of this consultation was, apart from evaluating the previous framework of cooperation, the identification of the objectives of the one that would come. The consultation took place both online and offline by involving young people, youth organisations, National Youth Councils, the European Youth Forum, policymakers, but also the Member States. A number of activities, therefore, were organised, which included a cycle of dialogue on “Future challenges for young people” with debates, at the local, regional and national level. Moreover, the Commission introduced the European Youth Week 2008, which called youth organisations all over Europe to organise events promoting youth participation and collecting data about the challenges of their target groups. In addition, an online questionnaire was answered by more than 5,000 young people, youth organisations and individuals working with young people in Europe, where they stated about their vision about the future of European youth policies. Finally, the Commission sent to the Member States a questionnaire to evaluate the present cooperation scheme and suggest their opinion for the forthcoming cooperation in the field of youth (European Commission, 2009a). As in every policy of the EU, there were also internal consultations, as it is also mentioned in the Impact Assessment of the 2009’s Youth Strategy.

The impact assessment included results of different consultations that the relevant department of the Commission conducted. Moreover, it analysed, the problems that the young people are facing, especially after the European economic crisis, underlined the importance of a new framework for the European youth policies, and what their objectives should be, according to this analysis. In addition to these, it presented some policy options, which would be their impact on the young people, the society, the Member States and the EU. The OMC was also mentioned in the document, as well as some conclusion about its processes. Those were based on the results of the Analysis of national reports from the Member States of the European Union concerning the implementation of the common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth (Commission of the European Communities, 2009b). The main outcomes are that many Member States, both previous or new ones (after the EU enlargement of

2004), have benefited by the OMC in youth policies as they introduced national reforms for this field. However, most of the stakeholders suggest that the tools of the OMC should be enhanced in order for the quality of cooperation to be reinforced. However, as in previous evaluations, many stated that there was lack of information towards the process or what EU youth policy actually is. Member States also mentioned that due to the different concepts of youth, there were misunderstandings about the information that they had to provide. A lot also mentioned that youth work and non-formal education have neither been much analysed nor become part of the cooperation framework (Commission of the European Communities, 2009a, p. 15).

3.1.2 The EU youth strategy 2010-2018

Characteristics

The EU Youth Strategy “Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities” was for many a response to the 2008’s EU Social Agenda. As it was mentioned before, it was widely perceived as the most important document of the EU towards the creation of a common European youth strategy. This is because it reflected the challenges of the young people and it was multiannual. The Communication by the Commission came on the 27th of April 2009. The text by itself was a very good analysis of the current situation of young people in Europe (Copeland & ter Haar, 2015, p. 8). The Commission *proposes a new, stronger Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that is flexible and simplified in its reporting and reinforces links with policy areas covered by the European Youth Pact in the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth* (Commission of the European Communities, 2009d, Chapter 1). According to the Commission, the current, at the time, framework (i.e the White Paper for Youth and the Youth Pact), had not constantly demonstrated its effectiveness and ability to convey and therefore, it was agreed that a new strengthened cross-cutting methodology for OMC was needed (2009d, Chapter 3.2.).

The strategy emphasised that a constant collaboration among youth policies and other policy areas affecting youth, such as education, employment etc., as well to the contribution of young people in it, was much needed (2009d, Chapter 4.1.). The priorities of the strategy were short-term, while the strategy itself was long-term. As a result, the Commission also proposed the renewal of these priorities every three years

in order to reflect the current challenges of young people and guarantee adaptability (2009d, Chapter 4.2.).

The strategy was comprised of eight fields of action, i.e. Employment and entrepreneurship, Social inclusion, Participation, Education & training, Health & well-being, Voluntary activities, Youth & the world, Creativity & culture. In every field, the Commission set some objectives, followed by proposed actions by the Member States, as well as the Commission, according to their respective competences.

The cooperation framework within the communication by the EC

The new cooperation framework was explained in Chapter 5 of the strategy, and analysed in 8 articles.

First of all, the strategy had two main objectives:

- *To provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market*
- *To encourage young people to actively participate in society*

A double methodology ought to be embraced so as to accomplish the two interrelated objectives. Initially, explicit activities should be attempted in the youth field – for example strategies and activities explicitly focused at youngsters in areas such as non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information. Furthermore, activities have to be mainstreamed – for example, activities to empower a cross-sectoral approach where a due record is taken of youth issues while detailing, actualizing and assessing arrangements and activities in other strategy fields, which have a huge effect on the lives of youngsters. This blending merged the double methodology of the 2001 framework, including the advancement of EU Youth Policies by explicit activities, and the advancement of youth issues by mainstreaming them into different fields. (Copeland & ter Haar, 2015, p. 13).

The Member States, according to the strategy, should have considered executing at national dimension cross-sectoral policymaking. Cross-sectoral cooperation should take place also with local and regional policymakers, such as the municipalities or regions. At the EU level, also the Council should take into consideration the cooperation among different Council formations, as well as the Commission should

strengthen the inter-service groups (Commission of the European Communities, 2009d, Chapters 5.1. A Cross-sectoral Approach).

Structured dialogue in this framework plays an even more significant role than before; it was also one of the key points of the evaluation of the previous framework. As a result, the Commission proposed themes for every year cycle, and invited the Member States to sustain a dialogue with the young people, monitoring the implementation of the strategy and EU youth policies and creating a space for joint reflection on its needs (2009d, Chapter 5.2. Dialogue with Youth).

The framework contained peer-to-peer learning amongst the Member States, as well as accumulation of knowledge for better policymaking. This happened through the annual organisation of 'High-Level Seminars' when political cooperation was important, and 'Clusters' when technical expertise was required (2009d, Chapter Chapter 5.3. Peer-learning for Better Policy-Making). Meanwhile, the Commission proposed the use of the so far knowledge reports of the Eurostat data, national reports, European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP), EU Research Framework Programme, but also the setting up of a Working Group to discuss possible 'descriptors' for the priorities of participation, volunteering, creativity and youth in the world, as well as for NEETs, the designing of a dashboard of existing indicators and benchmarks concerning youth in education, employment, inclusion and health, the renewal of existing trends for the priorities through Eurydice and the launching of further studies (2009d, Chapters 5.5. Evidence-based Policy-Making).

The implementation of the strategy relied a lot on the Member States, which should regularly consult the stakeholders and relevant ministries to set up the priorities and ensure the participation of as many actors as possible in the policymaking (2009d, Chapter 5.4. Implementation). Reporting was proposed to be simplified, every three years with a joint statement by the Commission and the Council. The strategy also proposed that the Member States publish their own national reports (2009d, Chapter 5.6. Simplified Reporting).

Finally, the programmes of the EU were mobilised for the implementation of the strategy and its priorities. Moreover, cooperation with the other EU institutions is important to achieve its objectives. The EU would continue to cooperate with the Council of Europe in the youth field (2009d, Chapters 5.7. Mobilisation of EU

Programmes and Funds & 5.8. Cooperation with other EU Institutions and International Organisations).

The following chart shows the intervention logic of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018.

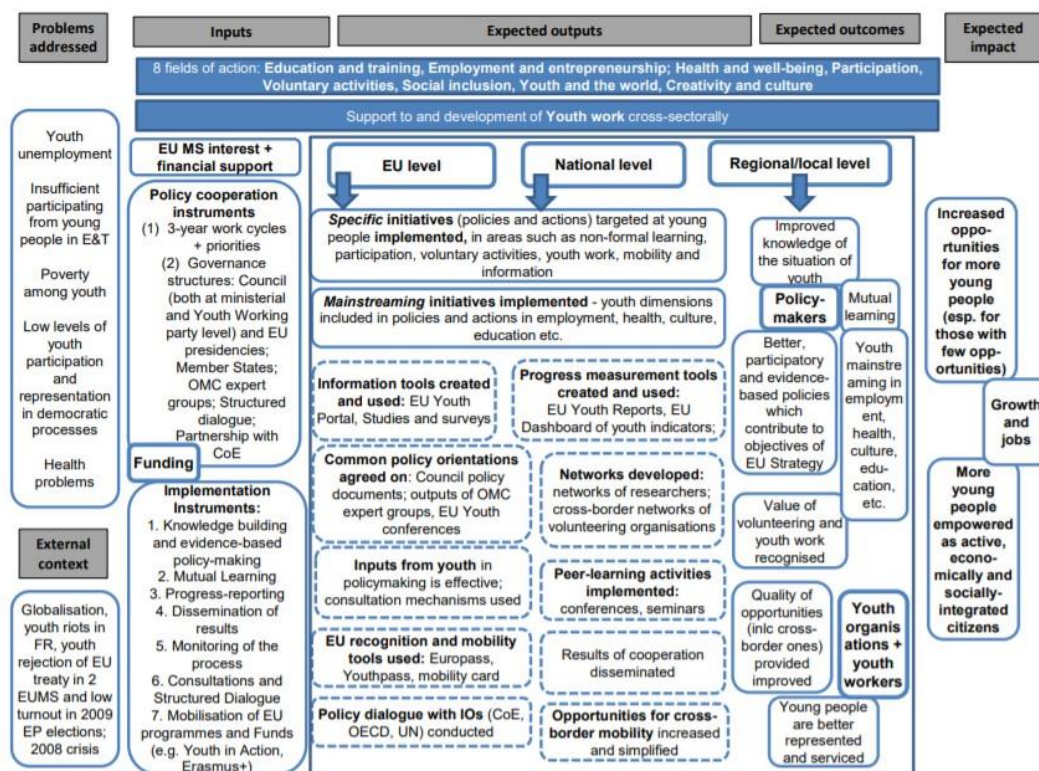


Chart 7 - (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016)

As it is easily understood by the chart, the complexity is very evident. The Member States' dedication is a key contribution to the EU Youth Strategy to be happening as it is governed by the OMC.

Developments after the Commission's Communication

After the adoption of the strategy by the European Commission on 27 April 2009, it was transmitted to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, for discussion by their relevant bodies. The Council adopted the strategy with the resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), where it welcomed the Communication and recognised the challenges that the young people face in Europe.

Working methods as reaffirmed by the Council

The Council paid attention and agreed on the success of the OMC in the youth field. In addition, it reaffirmed the working methods which should have been used. Those were:

(i) Work cycles: the whole strategy will be based on 3-year work cycles.

(ii) Priorities: for each cycle, some priorities would be set with a Council/Commission joint report, as mentioned in the Communication of the Commission as well. These priorities would be in line with the eight fields of action. The first cycle priorities were set with an Annex to that resolution, while the next ones followed.

(iii) Implementation instruments: as mentioned in the Communication of the Commission, in order to reach the dual approach, some instruments were needed which were analysed in that Resolution. These are the following:

(a) Knowledge building and evidence-based youth policy: youth policy should be based on data gathered by researches, surveys, studies, cooperation with stakeholders, as well as from relevant institutions and agencies, such as the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy.

(b) Mutual learning: the OMC is a cooperation framework through which learning is shared and Member States share their practices in order to inspire others or to be inspired. This would be happening through conferences and seminars, high-level forums or expert groups, as well as through studies and analyses and web-based networks, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

(c) Progress reporting: every cycle should be followed by an EU Youth Report, which is comprised by a joint report of the Council and the Commission, as well as statistical data gathered. The report would be also based on the national reports by the Member States. Apart from the fact that through this report it would be easier to monitor and evaluate the framework, it would also be an important tool for selecting new priorities for the next cycles of cooperation.

(d) Dissemination of results: dissemination plays an important role in order to reach relevant stakeholders at local, regional, and national level, as well as target groups to be informed.

(e) Monitoring of the process: the Commission and the members should be monitoring the progress and the achievement of the indicators set. This was to understand and evaluate the work so far, as well as to create new indicators for the consideration of the Council.

(f) Consultations and structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations: structured dialogue as well as consultations should be strengthened in the new cooperation framework. They were proven to be an important means to understand the needs of young people. The methodology as well as the objectives of these procedures should be based on those of the strategy. Further details on the implementation of the structured dialogue were provided in an annex of the Resolution.

(g) Mobilisation of EU Programmes and Funds: finally, the importance of the right use of the existing programmes of the EU done by the Member States was recognised. There were several programmes that can support the implementation of the youth strategy, such as the Erasmus+ programme.

The Council called the Commission to prepare in 2017 an evaluation of the overall achievement of the cooperation framework, which would be discussed by the Council in 2018 (Council of the European Union, 2009).

4. The road to a new EU Youth Strategy: Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2009-2018

The evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy is one of the core aims of this essay. This is because it gives good inputs for the implementation of it so far, as well as feedback on the OMC in the youth policies in Europe. Since the strategy was running till the end of 2018, the resources of the evaluation were not that many. Yet, those that have been selected are of great importance for the scope of this research.

In 2016's Communication "Investing in Europe's Youth" (European Commission, 2016a), the Commission committed to working closely with the Council and the Parliament in supporting the young people of Europe. In addition, the Council issued in 2017 a common position (Council of the European Union, 2017), where they agreed on the importance of a post-2018 EU Youth Strategy. As a result, it was evident that the European youth strategy would continue after 2018. In order for this to happen as it happened in the previous frameworks, a series of actions took place to measure the impact of the previous framework, and to consult with citizens, young people and experts in the field.

Those actions will help develop an understanding and evaluate the implementation of OMC within the European youth policies, and how they can be bridged for the current framework.

4.1 EU Youth Reports

As part of the 2010-2018 framework of cooperation in the youth field, the strategy was divided into three-year work cycles. After each cycle, the Commission prepared an EU youth report, which was adopted by the Council. The Reports assessed the progress of the objectives set in the strategy as well as the priorities of the work cycle, and based on them it suggested priorities for the next one. In addition, it distinguished the good practices of the Member States.

The report depended on the answers the Member States provided through a Commission survey covering all the eight key fields of the strategy. Youngsters and youth ministries were additionally consulted in their own countries. National Youth Reports likewise gave data on how the EU Youth Strategy has been actualized at the national dimension amid the present cycle (European Commission, 2019c).

2012

The 2012 EU Youth Report demonstrated the results of the principal work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-12) and proposed needs for the following three years. It presented insights on how the economic crisis had influenced the circumstance and status of youngsters in the EU during that period. The report was comprised by a Communication by the Commission, which was accompanied by two staff working papers, “Results of the first cycle of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field (2010-2012)” (European Commission, 2012a), and “Status of the situation of young people in the European Union” (European Commission, 2012b).

The report of 2012 described the actions by the European Union, the Member States and the young people. These were presented in relation to the objectives and priorities of the period. One of the main concerns and findings of the period is the increase of youth unemployment, young people in NEET situation, and as a result, young people at serious risk of social exclusion and poverty. This is because of the recent financial crisis that had influenced a lot the situation of young people. Therefore it was evident that the EU youth strategy should further focus on these issues and there should be a better mobilisation of EU funding (European Commission, 2012c, 2012a; European Commission & Council of the European Union, 2012).

2015

The 2015 EU Youth Report was distributed on 15 September 2015. It displayed a full image of the circumstance of youngsters in Europe and how policymakers have contributed to it in the period 2013-2015. The main problem during that period remains unemployment, which is an effect of the recent crisis. For this reason, the Commission and the Member States worked towards the improvement of youth’s employability and access to the labour market. This is due to the fact that young

people are very vulnerable, being in that bridging period of their life. Unemployment can lead to social exclusion and marginalisation.

In 2014, Erasmus+ had been launched, which merged different funding programmes of the European Union into one. 10% of the budget was decided to be reserved for youth activities, which means an increase of 80% of the budget of the previous youth programme “Youth in action”. The Commission also valued the presence and online promotion of these programmes a lot by renovating the European Youth Portal.

Moreover, there had been improvements also in the exchange of practices and experiences among the Member States as well as the implementation of the structured dialogue.

Some of the provided suggestions for the improvement of the framework were the focus on output-oriented youth policies, peer-learning to create opportunities, and structured dialogue to become more inclusive (European Commission, 2015).

2018

The Commission inaugurated a ‘roadmap’¹ for the EU youth report 2018 and the launch of a new cooperation framework. It followed the “Council conclusions on strategic perspectives for European cooperation in the youth field post-2018” (Council of the European Union, 2017), where the Council agreed that there should be a new youth strategy after 2018 according to the evaluation results (Council of the European Union, 2017). Through the roadmap, the Commission announced its intention to proceed with a revised EU Youth Strategy for the next period. Meanwhile, the Commission briefly analysed the different strategic documents that have been created through the previous cooperation framework, the various consultations that took place in order for stakeholders and young people to provide their view, as well as the steps taking place to move to the new period (EAC B3, 2018). The EU youth report results accompanied the Communication of the Commission for the new EU youth strategy 2019-2027.

¹ Roadmaps are used by the European Commission to inform the citizens, stakeholders and policymakers about a future initiative. They are invited through them to provide their feedback and views on the issues addressed. Roadmaps depict the issue to be handled and goals to be met, clarify why the EU activity is required, diagram approach choices and portray the primary highlights of the consultation strategy (European Commission, 2019i, sec. How their scope is defined).

4.2 Midterm evaluation (external)

The Interim Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers was propelled by the Directorate-General Education and Culture (DG EAC) in March 2015. It was the first external evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy since it was commenced in 2010. The report was prepared by ICF International in collaboration with Technopolis in the time of March 2015 to February 2016. It was published in March 2016 and it included discussions with a scope of EU and national-level partners who have taken part in the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy over the 2010-2015 period, including:

- young people;
- youth and volunteering organisations;
- Youth ministries;
- National Youth Councils;
- National Agencies for the Erasmus+ programme.

The evaluation methodology was based on qualitative and quantitative data collection and included: desk research, mapping of activities and outputs at EU and national level, 151 in-depth interviews, two online surveys and ten case studies. The data collected allowed the study to be evidence-based, as it involved different methods, tools and sources. Therefore, the report was an in-depth analysis of the EU Youth Strategy and included 11 annexes and 1 quality assessment by the relevant department of the DG EA C (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016).

A public consultation took place in 2016 with the aim to understand if citizens and youth organisations know about the ‘Youth strategy’ and how the youth policy cooperation can be improved. The results were used for the EU youth policy documents products and the interim evaluation produced (European Commission, 2016b).

Conclusions & recommendations

It is undeniable that during the period of evaluation, the status of young people in Europe has been worsening due to the financial crisis. As a result, youth policy was at the time very important, as only in the educational sector, in the eight fields of

actions, there was an improvement. In general, the EU youth strategy was well perceived both by the stakeholders as well as the young people, and the areas of work are linked with the real needs of young people. Yet, it seemed that the objectives suggested were a lot, not all relevant for all countries, and the proposed OMC did not offer focused actions (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016).

From the findings, the fact that the understanding and information of the European Youth policy was quite low was indisputable. Not only to young people, but also to stakeholders, policymakers, youth organisations. The reasoning underlying this lack of understanding was the complexity of the OMC, the broadness of its priorities, the low participation, and the small visibility. However, it is also understood that it affected positively a lot of areas in all European countries (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016).

Some challenges among others that the OMC were facing were the difficult and not focused reporting, the limited resources that the Member States spend for the participation of youth stakeholders in related activities, and the fact that not always participants of expert groups were suitable for that position (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016).

Recommendations:

- To concentrate on fewer and concrete objectives and create a clear vision for the next period;
- If the double focus (i.e. youth issues and youth mainstreaming) is kept, then specific objectives should be utilised for the mainstreaming, which will be communicated to stakeholders, policymakers on national as well local levels;
- To set more visionary and demanding objectives, especially for countries which have a culture in youth policies;
- To improve coordination at the EU level and enhance structured dialogue;
- To manage to have a better representation of young people and broader participation at the local, national and European levels;
- To use well the youth funding to create cooperation and initiatives which link to the objectives of the strategy;

- To have a better monitoring system of the achievements of the Member States within the strategy (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016).

4.3 Interim evaluation (internal)

The DG EAC initiated a roadmap in 2015 with the purpose of evaluating the OMC in the youth sector, as well as the Council recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers, and whether their objectives were incorporated in the OMC. This evaluation would serve as an interim evaluation with the goal to give insights and tips for the post-2018 youth strategy (DG EAC, 2015).

The evaluation rationale revolved around six unique tiers: relevance, coherence, EU added value, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. For every one of these categories, a progression of assessment questions was given, in view of the objectives recorded in the roadmap and afterward explicit assessment questions were promoted (European Commission, 2017c, pp. 3 & 8).

A steering committee of different Commission divisions managed the assessment, which was followed by an external evaluation (which is described above).

Although many different methodological approaches were used for the triangulation of data (adding credibility to the findings due to different research methods), many challenges were faced as well. Those can be summarised in the low and not outspread in the Member States participation, which is a result of survey fatigue (because they are called to participate in many researches and consultations). Secondly, one of the findings that popped up since the introduction of the European Youth Policies is the fact that it is difficult to measure whether the strategy had an impact on the lives of young people. This is because of the way the strategy had been developed: with immense objectives and multiple actions. Therefore, the different evaluations cannot connect the strategy with the impact it wants to achieve on the target groups due also to the lack of specific indicators and the voluntary way with which OMC works (2017c, pp. 10–13).

The evaluations found that the strategy is relevant to the needs of young people and coherent with the other policy areas. It brought an EU added value to the Member

States, as it produced motivation, awareness, recognition and means. At the same time, it was somewhat effective because, as mentioned, it did not achieve to reach and change the lives of young people. The OMC is open and it can be more accessible by young people and youth organisations in order to bring efficiency. It was agreed that the youth strategy should continue post 2018 (European Commission, 2017b, pp. 2–3).

4.4 European Youth Forum

In 2016, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) adopted by its General Assembly a Resolution on the EU Youth Strategy (European Youth Forum, 2016). The YFJ is a platform of the national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations in Europe. It is, in other words, the voice of organised young people (representing more than 10 million young people) as regards to their rights, and also is a partner of the European Union in shaping youth policies (European Youth Forum, 2019). As a result, their opinion matters and should be an important asset for the policymakers at the European level.

Taking as a good practice the Council of Europe’s “Joint Council on Youth”, the [FYJYFJ](#) proposed the use of a co-management system both in the development phase of the strategy and in the monitoring of EU funding programmes related to youth. This way, youth organisations and young people become partners of the EU and co-decide on specific issues that concern them directly, and their sense of ownership and engagement is becoming higher.

In addition, when it comes to governance, the [FYJYFJ](#) strongly criticised the OMC because it is the lowest level of participation of the Member States, due to its voluntary character. Hence, it has been evident and discussed also by the Parliament that the processes were slow and weak. There should be found a balance between flexibility and effectiveness because for the [FYJYFJ](#), voluntarism in the OMC is not working in the right direction. The [FYJYFJ](#) proposed that there should be less objectives and indicators, and at the same time these should be more, specific. A benchmarking system should be developed with stronger monitoring, with the introduction of National Action Plans, similar to what is happening in other policy areas of the EU. The [FYJYFJ](#) also stated that the different reports, such as the

triennial EU Youth Report, failed to observe and to showcase the progress of the Member States towards the objectives of the strategy. Furthermore, the [FYJYFJ](#) focused on the importance of having youth as a cross-cutting priority in different sectoral policies. Structured dialogue should also be reinforced and improved according to the feedback so far received, as it is one of the main ways youth participation is evident and real policy recommendations can be shaped by youth for youth with policymakers. Lastly, the [FYJYFJ](#) supported a lot the increase of the EU funding towards youth projects, most notably the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union (European Youth Forum, 2016, pp. 2–15). It is true that the [FYJYFJ](#), in partnership with 40 European-wide networks and civil society organisations, is leading the “Erasmusx10” campaign. The campaign advocates for a ten-times increase of the budget of the Erasmus+ programme after 2020 (<http://erasmusx10.eu>, 2019).

In 2017, the [FYJYFJ](#) issued a proposal for the governance of the EU Youth Strategy. This paper proposed innovations to the next framework and ways to become more participatory by young people, stakeholders and Member States. The main focus of it was in the principles of the governance, as well as its priorities and benchmarking, coordination and national commitments. More specifically, the [FYJYFJ](#) proposed:*

1. The new strategy should have a mix of fixed and flexible priorities, ensuring work towards continuous youth issues, as well as reacting to sudden social and economic challenges. This means that the priorities should be more focused and less. At the same time, there should an instrument that can react to sudden challenges.

2. As a part of the implementation of the strategy, Member States should be asked to commit to specific fields and priorities they will focus on. In addition, National action plans should be part of the implementation structure on a national level.

Each Member State should focus on tangible priorities for their National Work Plans. It is true that according to the evaluation of the youth strategy, although Member States used the priorities to focus on their plans, they all failed to focus on all eight priorities set.

With the following image, the [FYJYFJ](#) explained the process that they propose.

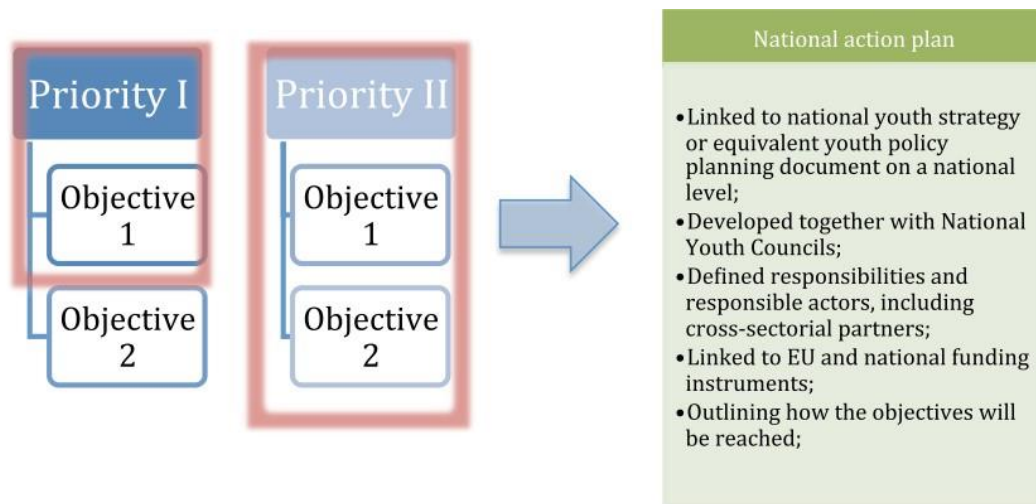


Chart 8- (European Youth Forum, 2017, p. 3)

3. A benchmarking system, where countries would commit to increasing certain figures from the indicators' dashboard according to the objectives they are working towards and having activities outlined in the National action plan on how to reach them. Benchmarks should be chosen in contact with stakeholders in each country, notably youth organisations, and they should be feasible and according to the needs of the country.

4. In order to achieve coordination between different EU institutions, Member States and partners, the ~~FYJYFJ~~ is proposing the establishment of a Coordination Working Group & Thematic Expert Groups. The working group would be led by DG EAC and several other stakeholders, and youth organisations or other European institutions would be taking part in it (i.e. the European Parliament, other DGs, etc.). Furthermore, it would be responsible for the implementation and coordination of the European Youth Strategy and would be a space for Member States to discuss and share their progress.

The process is explained with the following chart:

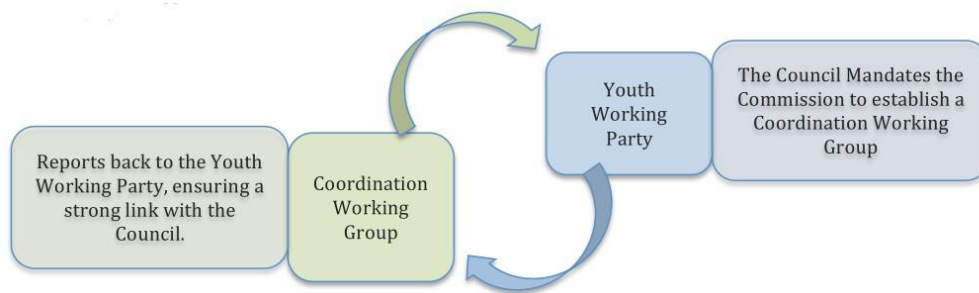


Chart 9 - (European Youth Forum, 2017, p. 6)

4.5 European Conference on the future EU Youth Strategy

A European conference on the future of the EU Youth Strategy took place in Brussels between 3 and 4 May 2017. It was organized by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture as part of the European Youth Week with the participation of 320 delegates (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education, Youth, 2017, p. 6).

While preparing the conference, the Commission organized six focus groups uniting partners from youth associations and national governments to talk about themes recognized at the mid-term assessment of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018). The subjects were the following:

- Promoting youth engagement, in particular through volunteering;
- Ensuring better links between funding sources for youth;
- More efficient cross-sectoral tools;
- Involving more actors in the cooperation;
- Youth participation: reform of the Structured Dialogue and beyond;
- Towards a more effective delivery of results (2017, p. 16).

The results of these focus groups were utilized in the workshops held in the Conference (2017, p. 6).

In addition, some discussions also took place around Europe, held by youth organisations as part of the project 'New Narrative for Europe'. Some of the participants involved were invited to the conference (2017, pp. 6–7).

The workshops organised in the conference were the following:

- Empowering young people to participate in society and express solidarity;
- Opening up the EU Youth Strategy's method of cooperation;
- Structured Dialogue or unstructuring dialogue;
- EU Youth Strategy: all you need is funding;
- The voice of youth outside youth policy: raising the volume or switching channel;
- How to deliver the 'best ever' EU Youth Strategy.

Some of the observations of the conference were that the EU youth strategy is a very important tool, for which the Commission should find more ways to exercise it, even though youth policies are not the exclusive competence of the EU. The results and the implementation of the strategy by the Member States should be available for consultation by everyone. At the same time, young people should be involved in all stages of the strategy, and it should be able to reach those who need it more than anyone, in every place of Europe. The needs and situation should be heard, and also this information should be known. The voice of underprivileged/marginalised youth should be equally heard, so as to take part in the cooperation framework. Finally, the Commission should find ways to connect different funding programmes and schemes for the facilitation of youth project funding, especially for young people with fewer opportunities. Programmes include Erasmus+, the EU Structural and Investment Funds, as well as national and regional funding (2017, p. 15).

4.6 Implementation Assessment by the European Parliament

In 2017, the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), which as explained in a previous chapter is the responsible body of the European Parliament for the youth sector, decided to produce a report on the EU Youth Strategy. The result was an impact assessment conducted by the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, within the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services. This assessment serves as a compilation of data already collected by different researches or national reports, and its aim is to open the discussion for the post-2018 EU youth policy scheme (Jan Tymowski & Maja Tihomirović, 2018, p. 3).

The report is structured by taking one by one all the priorities and objectives of the strategy and by assessing the progress of them based on data collected so far.

Starting from the implementation instruments, the Parliament addresses the approach indicated in the strategy, which is in line with the OMC. Through the youth strategy, Member States have been collaborating in the youth field in order to reach the objectives set by taking actions at the national level. The objectives and priorities could be seen as fields and instructions leading the members to take measures. At the same time, the European Commission supported the Member States through the use of a reporting system, the generation of studies and researches, as well as the systemisation of meetings among the Member States, stakeholders or relevant parties to support this collaboration. There were no legally binding objectives or requirements, and all these actions were based on the voluntary esteem of the Member States (2018, p. 13).

The objectives of the strategy were revolving around the creation of equal opportunities in education and in the labour market for young people, as well as the promotion of citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. A common observation has been the fact that they seemed quite universal and as a result, it had been impossible for researchers to measure whether they have been met. This is because they also depended on very extensive and variable factors, which were different for different Member States (2018, pp. 13–14).

As the strategy's objectives were general, it was entailed that a dual approach should be followed: specific initiatives, which would encourage the progress on these fields, and also initiatives that would take into account the youth factor in other fields of policies (cross-sectoral cooperation). As the strategy was broad, many of the objectives have been adopted in the Europe 2020 Strategy, and in May 2015, the Council adopted a paper with conclusions on enhancing cross-sectoral policy cooperation to effectively address socio-economic challenges facing young people (Council of the European Union, 2015) followed by an EU Work Plan for youth (Council of the European Union & Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2015). The plan included a number of proposed measures for youth mainstreaming (2018, pp. 14–15).

The different priorities set in the strategy were split into three work cycles of three years each. They led to the adoption of different policy papers, work plans or resolutions initiated by the different EU Presidencies at the time. However, it was evident that there has been an overlap of initiatives, priorities and repetition of phrases, which made the reporting quite challenging. The priorities were reaffirmed according to the needs of the young people at the period, the socio-economic environment. Structured dialogue, events and conferences helped in that direction (2018, pp. 15–17).

4.6.1 Implementation instruments

The strategy included several instruments of implementation of the OMC. These were implemented both at national and European level.

Knowledge building

Evidence-based policy-making was very much stressed in the EU youth strategy and the OMC. Therefore, several institutions contributed to the gathering of information and to knowledge about the situation of the young people in Europe. Those were:

- Commission departments for Communication, Education, Youth, Sport and Culture;
- Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA);
- European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy;
- Eurydice;
- Youth Wiki;
- Data from youth networks such as the YFJ and other stakeholders.

The combination of data from different institutions and the use of different tools provided insights that were important for the determination of the priorities to be adopted. Moreover, they were proved necessary for the development of the 2012 and 2015 youth reports (2018, p. 18).

Mutual learning

One of the OMC's core values is also the exchange of practices and experiences, and therefore the development of inspiration for different actors through this process. This in the youth strategy was supposed to happen through the gathering of

researches, the organisation of conferences and seminars, the meetings of the youth working groups, forums and expert groups.

The European Commission initiated an “Expert Group in the Youth Policy fields (E02547)”. The main mission of the working group was the gathering of results that could be used to answer to the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy, the EU Youth Reports, and the EU Work Plans. In addition, they provided backing to the Commission for the formation of further legislation in the field of youth (European Commission, 2019f). The experts were nominated by the Member States according to their expertise on the matters of discussion. Thus, there were different sub-groups discussing different matters. All the relevant materials produced, the list of members, the topics of discussion, as well as the agenda of their meetings, can be accessed publicly online.²

The peer-learning was supported also by the collaboration with other international organisations or third countries such as the Council of Europe, OECD, the United Nations, etc. (2018, pp. 18–19).

Progress reporting

According to the OMC used in the youth strategy, evaluation is performed through Youth Reports, which for this period were published in 2012 and 2015. These included a political part as a joint report by the Council and the Commission, and they were described in a previous section. The assessment here criticises the fact that these reports did not really evaluate the progress made towards the overall objectives and work-cycle priorities. In addition, they seemed too general again, which made difficult to compare the different national signs of progress and identify good practices. Moreover, they reported and evaluated specific actions, which limited the possibility of comparing the data and making suggestions for improvement (2018, pp. 19–20).

Dissemination of results

It is foreseen that the EU Youth Strategy should be widely disseminated at the European, national, regional and local levels. This was in order to be known and receive an impact by stakeholders and young people. The reports by the Commission

2

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2547&NewSearch=1&NewSearch=1>

do not show great progress, and often focus on the national governments and interest parties. Although stakeholders already know about the EU Youth Strategy, special focus should have been put to young people, especially those who are not represented by youth organisations. Yet, since the internet and social networks are very popular among those ages, the European Youth Portal has been initiated, which works as a platform that informs about different opportunities about youth-related activities (namely youth exchanges, voluntary activities, etc.). In addition, the EU Youth Strategy had been online, as well as all the information about different initiatives was open to the public.

The Eurodesk network, which is an EU-funded initiative that provides information on learning mobility to young people and youth workers, also helped in the dissemination of results. However, it is evident that all this online information or campaigns that have been done so far did not reach the results and the impact that they initially aimed at (2018, pp. 20–21).

Monitoring the process

It has been much discussed in the external study, which served as the mid-term evaluation of the strategy, that it is quite impossible for researchers to monitor or evaluate the policy in comparison also with the situation of young people on the basis of indicators. To solve this, the working group on youth created a dashboard of indicators with a Youth Monitor. Yet, although it was easy to see the differences among the Member States, it was difficult in the end to understand whether the youth strategy has been effective for the lives of young people. An instrument is lacking by the OMC to measure all members' progress towards benchmarks. The European Parliament also proposed that in a resolution adopted in October 2016.

Consultation and structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations

One of the most important and concretely described instrument of the EU youth strategy is the structured dialogue. The strategy sought the continuous consultation for the priorities and initiatives of the cooperation framework. Structured dialogue was not something new for the EU, as it was initiated in 2005 as part of the Youth Pact. It is undeniable, therefore, that it became a good practice.

Other important initiatives that resulted in the consultation of young people included the EP Ambassador School Programme, which was established by the

European Parliament, youth projects in the Parliament's Information Offices in the Member States, and the European Youth Event (EYE) (2018, pp. 22–23).

EU programmes and funds

The EU Youth Strategy is not a financial scheme; yet, several EU programmes were in line with its objectives, and therefore assisted in its implementation. Such included the Erasmus+ programme, which funds youth-related projects, and one of its actions facilitates structured dialogue at a national level. Other funding programmes were Horizon 2020, FP7, Europe for citizens, European Social Fund and other European, national and regional funds.

It is criticised that the OMC costs for the field of youth were financed much less than for other policy areas. This was mentioned by many Member States as challenging, even though the results were good having in mind the low budget (2018, pp. 23–24).

4.6.2 Overall conclusions by the assessment

The assessment found that the European framework of cooperation in the youth field, the priorities set, and the OMC remain relevant. Yet the OMC's efficiency was difficult to be measured. As discussed in several other reports, as for example the one of the European Conference on the future EU youth strategy in May 2017 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Education, Youth, 2017), the number of areas covered and the initiatives by this strategy were quite a lot, overlapping, and tended to be broad. The objectives of the strategy *remain quite general, with a complicated mechanism of establishing political priorities*. The effect of the strategy on young people was also uncertain, as the Eurostat data Eurobarometer surveys do not correspond with the relevant actions of the strategy.

There should have been an instrument to compile the data and compare them; this would help in the measurement of the real policy impact. In addition, benchmarking should be followed methodically. The reporting system suggested by the strategy through the Youth Reports could only provide good practices of the Member States, and can only result in a general conclusion rather than a certain result. The consultation with young people should be further developed and become more inclusive. Young people should be taking part, especially those from disadvantaged

environments. Member States should also make use of the EU funds for the support of the implementation of the youth strategy initiatives (2018, pp. 96–98).

5. Towards a new EU Youth Strategy

In May 2018, the European Commission issued a Communication named “Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy” (European Commission, 2018d), which was adopted by the Council in November 2018. The strategy serves as the cooperation framework for EU youth policy for 2019-2027.

The announcement for the post-2018 cooperation framework was accompanied by the Commission’s Staff Working Documents “Results of the open method of coordination in the youth field 2010-2018” (European Commission, 2018c) & “Situation of young people in the EU” (European Commission, 2018i).

The document with the results examines thoroughly what has been done during the 2010-2018 strategy, and also proposes solutions for the EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027. More specifically, it speaks about the main achievements of the period, presents the findings from the external evaluation, Member States’ reports and the results of different consultations, and gives the key information about the new strategy. In addition, there are some annexes with policy indicators and a work plan for the period 2019-2021, which is to be considered by the Council (European Commission, 2018c, p. 3).

5.1 Main changes identified for the EU Youth Strategy

Here it will be outlined what the new EU Youth Strategy took into consideration as the main challenges to focus on. These were based on different evaluation and consultation outcomes, which took place in different periods and are presented in the previous chapter.

Cross-sectoral dimension of youth policy: It is widely accepted that young people should be taken into consideration in different strategies and policies which affect them. Many of the Member States indicate the necessity for strong coordination on that, and for visibility of the sector.

Focus and flexibility: It has been widely discussed in many evaluations and consultations that the strategy “should focus on fewer, fixed and flexible priorities which can tackle sudden social and economic challenges”.

Focus on youth-specific themes (participation, youth mobility and volunteering, youth work), while strengthening cross-sectoral approach: This “dual approach” has been shared by many stakeholders, including the Member states, the Council and the European Parliament.

Links between EU youth policy implementation and related EU programme activities: All reports and consultations mentioned the need of links between the priorities and the EU funding.

Improving the structured dialogue, including with a wider and more diverse outreach to young people: Structured dialogue has been considered as a great tool for involving young people in dialogue, especially in areas that matter to them the most. However, it is very important that also disadvantaged young people take part in this process by using different tools, approaches or means.

Participatory governance: Young people should take part in the decision-making and the OMC should be more inclusive.

Reaching out more locally, to reach a more diverse population of young people: Adding to the above two key points, the strategy should focus on reaching young people at the local level and from disadvantaged areas.

Need for a monitoring framework: It has been widely discussed that there should be a mechanism which observes and evaluates the achievements of the strategy, as well as a benchmarking system so that the Member States align to specific indicators.

Need for reinforced mutual learning: All the documents produced through the youth strategy are important for exchanging practices among the Member States and inspiring them for more (European Commission, 2018c, pp. 62–64).

5.2 Priority areas of the new EU Youth Strategy

The new strategy is based on some key points, which consist of instruments that facilitate the “cross-sectoral cooperation”, and an interim report, which will permit to check these areas and change them for the following period, if required.

The three keywords used for the strategy are “Engage, Connect and Empower”, and all priorities will be around them.

ENGAGE: Fostering youth participation in democratic life;

CONNECT: Bringing young people together across the EU and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding;

EMPOWER: Supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.

The priorities will be:

- Education and training;
- Youth employment and entrepreneurship;
- Health, including mental health;
- Youth poverty and social inclusion;
- Integration of young people with a migrant background;
- Digitalisation, internet and media;
- Sustainability and climate change (2018c, p. 69).

5.2.1 New initiatives

EU Youth Goals

One of the results of the sixth cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue - Youth in Europe: What’s next?, which took place between 2017 and 2018, was the setting up of youth goals at the EU Youth Conference in Vienna in 2018.

Chart 10 shows the process that the sixth cycle of Structured Dialogue followed in order to reach the adoption of the youth goals.

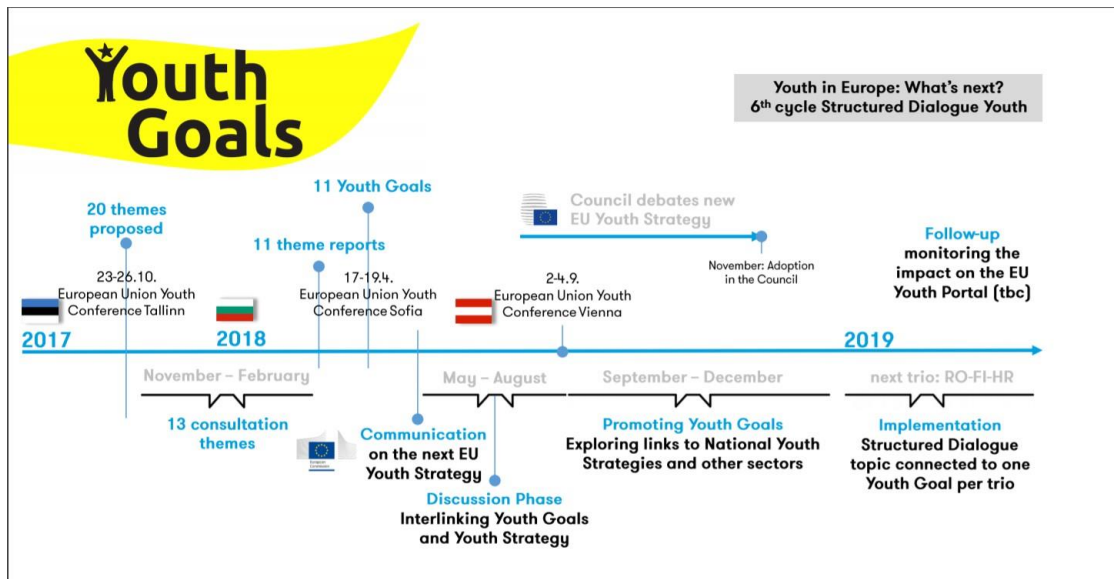


Chart 10 - (youthgoals.eu, 2018)

Youth goals became part of the EU Youth Strategy by showing also that structured dialogue is taken into consideration by the policymakers.

Those are:

1. Connecting the EU with Youth;
2. Equality of All Genders;
3. Inclusive Societies;
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue;
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing;
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward;
7. Quality Employment for All;
8. Quality Learning;
9. Space and Participation for All;
10. Sustainable Green Europe;
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes (European Commission, 2019e).

Mutual Learning and Expert Groups

Mutual learning was one of the key points of the previous strategy as well and the core of the OMC. For this, as mentioned earlier, special expert groups have been initiated by the European Commission, and there have been events, conferences and studies organised. In addition to these, the new framework proposes peer reviews and

peer counselling, high-level forums, analysis and studies. The priorities of the EU Youth Strategy will follow again three years long work plans (European Commission, 2019h).

EU Youth Dialogue

The structured dialogue will be replaced in 2019 by the EU Youth Dialogue, which will now also have activities at the local level, capturing ideas and following up with their implementation. The initiative will run, as the previous one, in cycles of eighteen months led by Trio Presidencies. National Working Groups, as well as online consultation, will be included so that there will be much more participation by young people with fewer opportunities (European Commission, 2018c, p. 66).

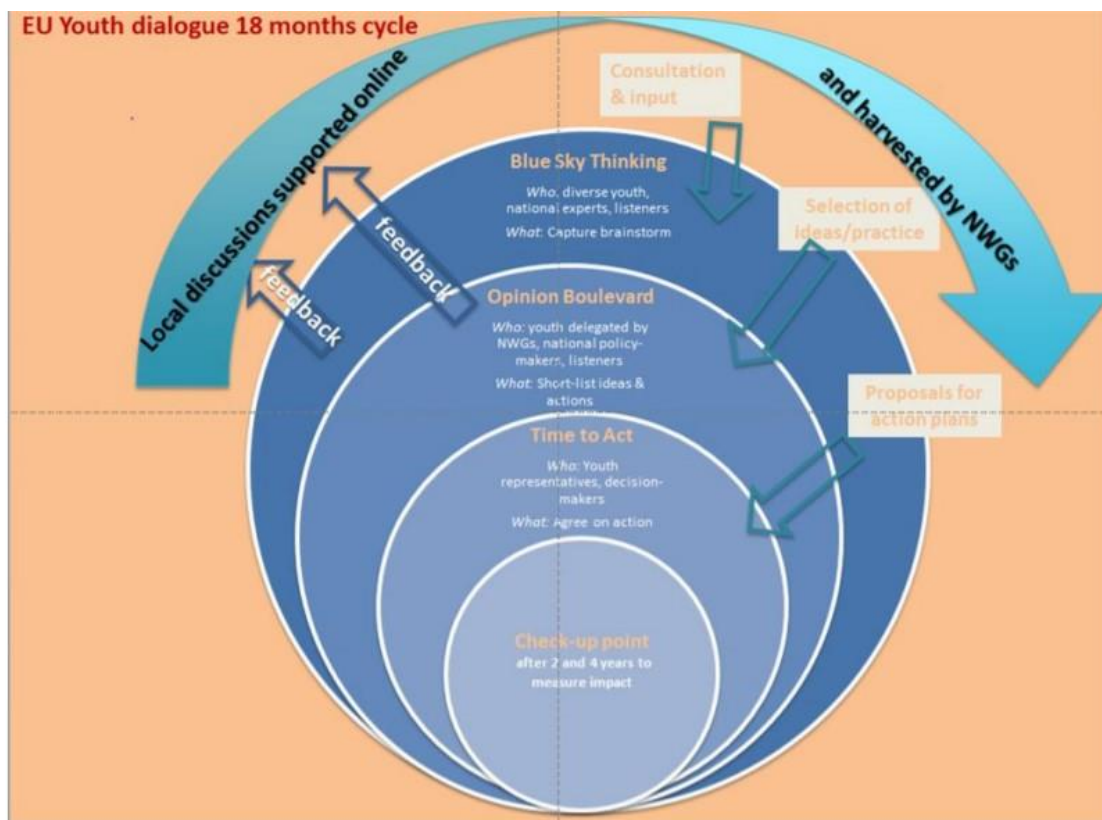


Chart 11 - (European Commission, 2018c, fig. 1)

The above chart analyses the way that the EU Youth Dialogue will work from now on. This time, the process will aim to reach even more young people and decision-makers, and will function as a platform for exchanging feedback between different actors (European Commission, 2019b).

EU Youth Strategy Platform

This initiative will gather representatives of the EU institutions, youth organisations, researchers, National Agencies that manage the Erasmus+ and other stakeholders once a year to discuss about the progress of the cooperation framework in youth (European Commission, 2018c, pp. 69–70). There will be also dedicated meetings for sharing information and reviewing the progress and implementation of the strategy and of the EU Youth Dialogue. It will serve also in making the process transparent and giving the opportunity to different actors to feel the ownership of the strategy (European Commission, 2019d).

Future National Activities Planners

The Future National Activities Planners will serve as a means for the Member States to share their priorities within the EU Youth Strategy and bring synergies amongst themselves. The goal is that countries inspire each other and collaborations are created (European Commission, 2019g).

EU Youth Coordinator

One of the proposals in many evaluations was a better coordination of the actions of the EU Youth Strategy. In the new framework, this will be done by an EU Youth Coordinator within the European Commission. The Youth Coordinator will have as an aim to make the strategy more visible to young people and stakeholders, and also to boost the cross-sectoral cooperation (European Commission, 2019a).

Monitoring & Reporting

The new strategy proposes the building up of the existing dashboard of EU youth indicators and the creation of policy indicators for measuring the progress of Member States. This will be done by the setting up of an expert group managing of the crafting of policy indicators.

The reporting will follow the same pattern as the previous strategy and the Youth Wiki. In addition, the 2024 Report will also allow checking whether the strategy can be reviewed in case it is required (European Commission, 2018c, pp. 70–71).

Chart 12 shows graphically how monitoring and reviewing will be done.



Chart 12 - (European Commission, 2018c, fig. 2)

Dissemination

The Commission has received many inputs on the dissemination, and proposes the translation of the outcomes of the EU Youth Strategy and cooperation framework in national languages so as to be more accessible. Moreover, the Commission recommends the use of the existing networks (National Agencies, SALTO resource centres, Eurodesk) and the European Youth Portal for accessing information about youth matters (European Commission, 2018c, p. 71).

EU programmes

The evaluations so far have spoken for a clearer link of the EU programmes with the EU Youth Strategy. To do that, Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and other EU funding sources will be used (European Commission, 2018c, p. 72).

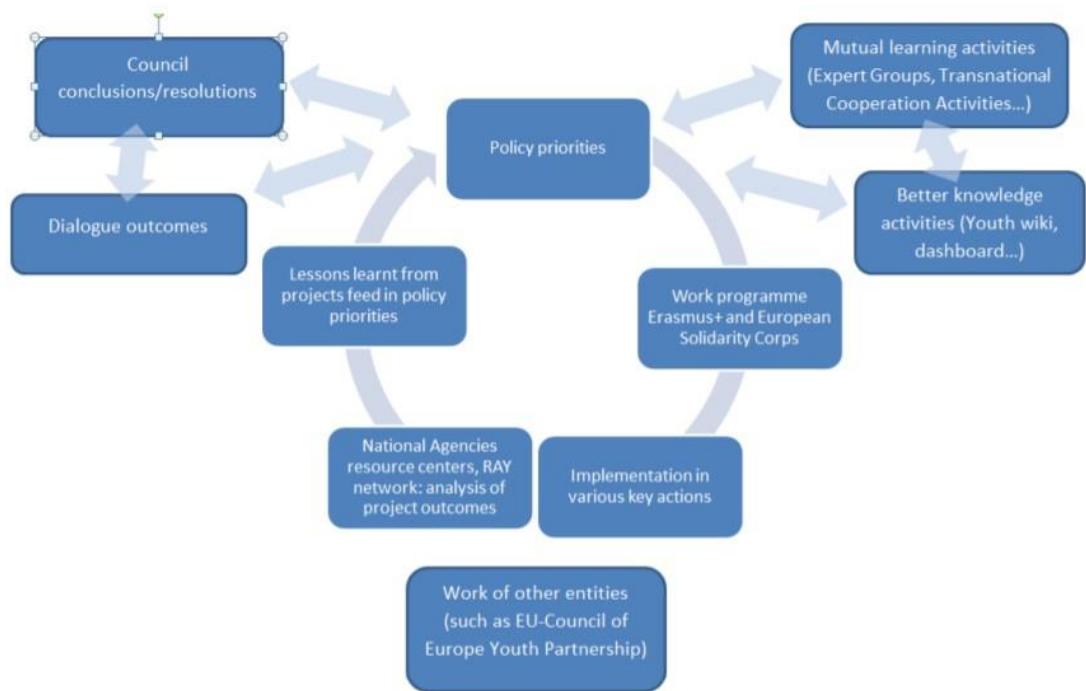


Chart 13 - (European Commission, 2018c, fig. 3)

Chart 13 shows the cycle of work of the EU youth strategy to be followed. We see how different initiatives are connected.

5.3 Reactions by relevant stakeholders

5.3.1 Eurodesk

Eurodesk has issued a paper in September 2018 welcoming the new EU Youth Strategy. As an information platform, it gives very much importance to the right information to young people about their opportunities. Therefore, it proposes exhaustive and all-inclusive information, which will facilitate the involvement of young people who are not easy to be reached.

Eurodesk has been perceived by the different evaluations as a good asset. Therefore, the network proposes further and better funding for it. In addition, it thinks that it is important that the Member States should put youth information as a priority in the National Action Plans. In that direction, it gives many recommendations of actions that can be adopted. Moreover, it believes it is important to enhance the participation of young people and welcomes the EU Youth Dialogue, which should be

further communicated for the participation of even more distant young people. Synergies should be created, especially with those who have a great experience with young people with fewer opportunities. Finally, the policies should be coherent with the EU programmes, and the EU Youth Coordinator should work closely with the relevant stakeholders to ensure the hearing of young people who have a voice.

The reaction is followed with an annex containing a “Youth Information Action Plan”, which identifies different fields of actions that can be taken into consideration (eurodesk, 2018).

5.3.2. European Youth Forum

As mentioned before, the YFJ is one of the most important interlocutors of the European Union when speaking about youth policy and rights. This is because it is supposed to be representing all the organised young people in Europe, and also striving to represent those who are not represented at all.

After the announcement of the new EU Youth Strategy, the YFJ issued three statements for the EU Youth Strategy, the EU Youth Dialogue and the EU Youth Coordinator.

The YFJ recognises that the new strategy is important, as it brings the youth issues in the political agenda of the Member States for the next 9 years. In addition, it praises the fact that the YFJ participated in the shaping, by working with the Youth Unit of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission and by having proposed several documents to be adopted through the process.

The YFJ welcomes the new initiatives set by the EU Youth Strategy. It believes that in order for them to be working, they need to be implemented throughout Europe and to be accessed by young people who are not easily accessed. The new Youth Work Agenda shows the importance and recognises that youth work and non-formal learning should play a key role in the growth of young people, their education and social inclusion. Participation is very important and should be done at all levels by young people (European Youth Forum, 2018b).

Therefore, in order for the EU Youth Dialogue to be working, it should be based on some principles:

- Meaningful youth participation;
- Inclusive for diverse voices;
- Contributing to local, national and EU policy-making;
- Youth-led process;
- Recognising the role of the National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations;
- Youth friendly implementation.

The Commission should use the good practices of the Structured Dialogue and build on it, ensuring that all these principles exist. The YFJ proposes different actions for the governance, the flow of the cycles, the funding of it, as well as the dialogue with EU candidate countries (European Youth Forum, 2018a).

The YFJ also welcomes the EU Youth Coordinator, which was one of the suggestions by the civil society which was addressed in different evaluation documents. Coordination among the different institutions and the Commission is of great importance for bringing quality in youth policies and contributing in the cross-sectoral collaborations. Youth issues should be considered by all policy initiatives of the EU and should be high on the agenda. In addition, it is important that the EU Youth Coordinator works closely with the interservice group on youth and observes the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy Platform (European Youth Forum, 2018c).

Conclusions

Having analysed the European framework of cooperation in the youth field, as well as how the OMC is working, it is time to showcase some conclusions. One of the core questions suggested even before the start of the research on the field for the development of this essay was if OMC is the best option and useful for the European Youth Policies. To answer this question, we have to understand the options we have and if another option was possible in this case. Easily we understand, as analysed throughout the paper, that youth policies is a field which does not fall into the exclusive competence of the EU. This is true because according to the TFEU article 165 pars. 1 & 2, the Member States are responsible for implementing their own policies in the fields of education, sports or youth. Youth is slightly used as a word in the text. Some words used by the Treaty are “contribution”, “encouragement” and “promotion”.

As a result by default, according to EU law, not many choices are left to the EU to negotiate or to propose laws for the youth field. Therefore, the OMC might be the best “least” option that the EU could adopt for the European youth policies. Other choices of soft law might have been action programmes, recommendations and resolutions.

The OMC is a relatively new governance method, and subsequently not always very successful. This is because in order for this to really work and produce results, there should be a very good coordination, as many parties are taking part in it (stakeholders, countries, the EU institutions, experts, young people, ministers and governments, etc.) and at many levels (local, regional, European). For the EU, it is also a new tool which is tested now and is evolving through the years.

The OMC in the youth policy field, according to the different studies used in this essay, has brought about relatively good results. Although “results” might not be the best word to be used here, having in mind that due to the sub-fields and objectives that have been used, it was difficult even for the youth researchers to examine its impact. In any case, the OMC has produced many advances, one of which is the flexibility and the cooperation spirit. Cooperation thrived for many Member States,

which brought good results. It is true the European cooperation framework assisted a lot the Member States to advance national youth plans and cross-sectoral collaboration. About all Member States have presented activities or apparatuses in this field since 2010. 66% of the members have fortified national youth priorities and needs, while eleven Member States have reoriented their national youth policy in accordance with the strategy. It is a common observation that in such processes “name and shaming” of the Member States might result in common benefit. Of course, as it is a voluntary process, many Member States have tried to converge in the least possible.

It is observed somehow that the different evaluations and assessments are taken into consideration by the EU. This is why the new cooperation framework is based on the suggestions driven by the previous one. We observed the reconstruction of the functioning of the OMC in the youth field and the adoption of new tools, tools that reflect the stakeholders’ views, such as the “EU Youth Coordinator”.

So, answering the questions again, the OMC may indeed be the best option the EU has, as ‘hard law’ is not possible in this case. However, this doesn’t mean that there is no space for improvement. As mentioned, the OMC is an evolving mechanism by itself, and the EU officials should take into account the suggestions by the experts and the evaluation results.

It seems, however, that youth has been rising in the agenda of the EU in recent years. Since 2001, a lot of documents and policies have been adopted by the EU and a lot of progress has been made by the Member States. It is believed that the EU has done the right choice and the period for doing that is significant. It coincided with different other broader EU strategies and policy fields, such as the Lisbon Strategy, the Laeken Declaration, the 2008 New Social Policy Agenda, and Europe 2020. Soon the EU understood that young people are vulnerable to shocks and they should be protected somehow. They are also the generations that will shape the future of the EU.

The EU Youth Strategy came just at the start of the European debt crisis, when the first results of it started to show. The effects on young people were severe, with high unemployment, marginalisation and social exclusion. Therefore, the EU chose the right time to try to make a progress in the youth policy area. Since then, the European Youth Policies have been maturing and becoming more and more ambitious.

Following this essay, a research could be made on how the EU Youth Strategy really affects young people's lives in Europe. However, such research needs the accumulation of data of different countries, Eurostat statistics, and a comparative analysis with the benchmark indicators of the strategy.

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