

YOUTH LEADERSHIP GUIDE

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, KOSOVO*, SERBIA,
NORTH MACEDONIA: YOUTH PARTICIPATION CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE



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Balkan Regional
Platform for Youth
Participation
and Dialogue



Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue

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NORTH MACEDONIA: YOUTH PARTICIPATION CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE**

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FOREWORD

Youth Leadership Guide presented here is the result of four year activities developed by the Local Democracy Agencies while implementing the regional work programme Balkan Youth The publication comprises a set of methodological approaches applied whilst working with youth groups in local communities in nine LDAs host cities Prijedor, Mostar, Zavidovici, Niksic, Subotica, Knjazevac, Peja/Pec, Skopje, Kavadarci. A wide scope of capacity building programmes, advocacy actions, indoor and outdoor workshops, information campaigns, intercultural exchange, job shadowing, creative artistic interventions, youth correspondents networking, sport and recreational activities engaging both formal and informal youth groups were designed, piloted and organised jointly by the regional team of youth engagement workers. Experience gained has become a part of each LDAs portfolios and even more importantly, both the methodology applied and variety of local youth participatory practices are now integrated in regional co-operation and exchange programme targeting youth groups in geographically marginalised urban and rural communities across the region.

Therefore, this publication is prepared as a useful youth friendly guide for local NGO practitioners, youth workers but also for local policy /decision makers. Certainly, this collection of locally developed and implemented youth participatory practices will not change the life of young people in local communities across the region largely affected by endemic brain drain and youth unemployment, but it can help encourage at least some of them to take action and get engaged in order to make the positive change happen in their own local community.

Stanka Parac Damjanovic
ALDA Southeast Europe Regional Programme Co-ordinator



INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

It is a well-known fact that young people make at least one third of the population in most of the local communities. Their role in developing and shaping up the community is extremely important, albeit not always acknowledged by adults.

Youth activism means social engagement and political activism of young people, active participation of young people in resolving their priority concerns and decision-making in local communities, as well as at the state level. For example, in the Republic of Serbia there are about a million young people. They represent an extremely important category of population and future bearers of the change. Therefore, it is necessary to dedicate adequate attention to their needs, attitudes and desires, as well as support and development of youth activism.

Young people most efficiently and easily represent their interests through youth activism: networking and implementation of the project in order to improving the quality of life of young people, as well as the realization of rights and equal opportunities for participation in different areas of society. Youth activism is not a single activity, but rather a set of different policy measures and projects. It involves small local actions in local communities, but also large scale projects and networking of youth and youth organizations at regional, national or international level. In order to more effectively and efficiently work on the improvement of the state of youth and the advancement of the civil society.

Youth activism includes:

- Joint efforts of young people and opportunities for acquiring new attitudes, knowledge and skills
- A set of different interests, talents, opportunities and needs
- Personal contribution of young people in achieving common goals based on the interests and needs of young people
- Challenging activities leading towards a positive change beneficial to young people and / or communities

Youth participation implies an active engagement of young people throughout their own communities, in everyday life. Youth participation is important and has benefits for the young people themselves, the youth group they are part of and community as a whole. Throughout participation a young person becomes more self-confident and assertive, reaches out from their own comfort zone, learns new skills, gains new knowledge and information, cooperates with their peers

but also supports development of the community where he/she lives. Youth participation to large extent contributes to social development of the community. Young people by developing themselves are developing their own role in their communities, becoming active and positive change for the society.

Last but not the least, participation is a fundamental right, as one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations.

The main purpose of this publication is to show different aspects and importance of youth participation in Western Balkan region, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. With this publication we want to explore some useful tools needed for young people engagement and participation in the community, but also show what tools and platforms for youth participation were developed and applied within *Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue*.

To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools, such as information and education about their rights and access to their rights. Young person needs to feel that is has power of decisions as adults around them, and that their opinion is valued.

Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue is actually doing this throughout of number of activities and tools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Serbia,

Development of this publication, as well as development of the whole Balkan regional platform also included different stakeholders, young people and desk research on youth participation, leadership and activism in five Western Balkan countries participating in the platform.



Collecting and disseminating the quality information to young people:

- Creating youth friendly suitable ways of transmitting and distributing information;
- Establishing local info points outside the youth club;
- Encouraging, supporting and coordinating the mutual exchange of information among young people;
- individual information and counselling in the youth club and info centre;

Capacity building for youth organizations: management skills, fundraising, work with volunteers, public relations:

- Educational support for creative work; various creative workshops;
- Improving skills that increase youth employment (foreign languages, computers ...);
- Innovative forms of education.

Integration of young people in society:

- Democratic forms of association and action of young people;
- Active participation of young people in all public issues / issues at the local level;
- Education for active citizenship;
- Actions of civil society organizations in the youth sector.

Service centre for citizens' associations:

- an actor in the implementation of active employment measures;
- day centre;
- organizer of cultural life;
- organizer of extracurricular activities, as well as activities in nature, for the needs of the formal education system;
- multimedia centre;
- business / entrepreneurial incubator;
- sale of youth cards (which provide discounts for young people)

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

If you ever think you're too small to be effective, you've never been in bed with a mosquito!— Wendy Lesko

When one wants to work on youth participation it is important to understand basic principles of youth participation in general but also to understand youth participation forms, approaches and theories, and youth participation in their own community, among their own youth.

Young people, youth groups, youth organizations and decision makers are looking at youth participation from different angles. In history youth participation was also perceived as young involvement and it was used by decision makers, educators, youth workers and other to define young people role in culture, sport, school, and community and economy development.

All of these angles show that young people do have important role in development of the communities and that not everyone sees their role in same way.

So what is youth participation about? What actually young people need to participate in.

According to UN General Assembly distinguishes following areas of youth participation:

Economic participation

Political participation

Social participation

Cultural participation

Participation of young people in this practical policy is understood as active participation of young people in the processes of making decisions on any issue, at all levels and in all sectoral policies. Participation of young people in decision-making processes takes place through programs and activities of youth associations and for young people, as well as informal groups. An important form of participation of young people is certainly participation in the work of institutions and bodies in which they can associate themselves.

1. Young people have the right to participate;
2. Youth participation increases the level of success in achieving autonomy and quality of life in society;
3. Young people gain competence through participation;
4. Youth participation strengthens democracy in society;

There is also the question of what brings a young person to participate, what is their motivation to take action and how to invite young people to participation, how to provoke them to take step forward in their own development in the development of their community.

Let's think about:

- How does your organization define young people?
- Who are the young people you work with? Who are the young people you want to work with?
- What youth participation is for yourself? What is youth participation for your organization? Is there a common understanding among your staff, volunteers and young people you work with?
- How does your organization bring young people to take part, to participate in community? What is their motivation to do so?
- What is your future goal in youth participation? What do you want to achieve in one (or five) year time in your organization?

Youth participation approaches

If you answer these questions for yourself and then answer it together with a group of your co-workers you will have an opportunity to learn and exchange, but if you try to get the answers to these very same questions from the young people in your community, you will notice some approaches that can push you and your organization into different way dealing with youth participation.

Perhaps two most useful approaches to understand youth participation are *Triangle of Youth Participation* by Marc Jans and Kurt De Backer and *Hart's Ladder of Participation*. Both very useful in understanding what youth participation is, what motivates young people to participate, what makes the difference in working with young people and developing their participation skills, but also both helpful in developing youth participation projects.

Triangle of Youth Participation

This model developed by Marc Jans and Kurt De Baker is suggesting that young people will actively participate in their community when there is a balance between three dimensions: *the challenge, the capacity and the connection to others*. This model is based on the explanation that a young person needs to feel challenged by something in the community, they need to see, understand the problem in the community and feel challenged to solve it. Furthermore, young person needs to feel that he/she has the capacity to contribute to it by their own engagement and skills.

The last dimension of this model is the fact that young person needs to be aware of a connection to others to be able to work on the challenge collectively.

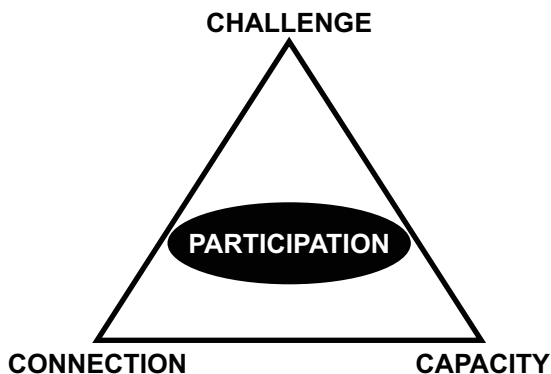
The model is taking all three dimensions in a very flexible way:

Participation is based on challenge – the participation theme is very directly attached to everyday life of young peoples in their community. It is about something very important to them, engaging them and it is their interest.

Participation is based on the capacity- young people need to have some skills and knowledge on the theme. Initiatives they are participating in should be done in a manner that young people can use their own skills but also develop new.

Participation should be based on the connection - when participating young people feel as a part of the solution, connected and supported by ideas, other people, groups, community and movements.

Flexibility means that not every dimension has the same importance for young people's participation. The challenge they can feel can exceed their capacity to work on the solutions, but by doing so, young people are connecting to others and developing their participation capacity in the community. One working in the field of youth needs to understand these three principles and how young people are behaving within the triangle.



Hart's Ladder of Participation

Ladder of Participation, developed by Roger Hart, is a model that explains how young people's participation has different levels and it can be build up to young people taking over the whole responsibility over the processes depending on the situation, initiates, projects, etc. This model is showing us different level of involvement and engagement of young people in the projects, initiatives, organizations and communities.

The model is encourages those working with youth to involve and engage young people and enable young people to take an active part in decision making, and give them the opportunity to have a 'voice' in society.

According to Hart, the youth participation has eight different levels referring to them as ladder steps.

The first three steps are considered not be engaging young people in active participation. These are actually providing pathway for young people move, but not taking decisions or responsibility. Following five ladders are integrating young people in the processes of decision making and taking responsibility over the process.



Step 1 - Young people are manipulated

In this stage young people are invited to be part of the project but they don't have any influence on the decision and outcomes. Like this their presence in the project is used to achieve some other goals. Very often this methods is used by different stakeholders in order for them to say that they have involved young people, but young people do not have the feeling of participation in this stage.

Step 2 – Young people are decoration

Young people are need in the project to represent certain group, as underprivileged group. Here, young people have the role, but not really being present and participating, they are decoration to the event, workshop or the whole project. They are very visible by outsiders and not participating, not taking decisions.

Step 3 – Young people tokenized

Young people have no real influence on any decision within the project but illusion of participation is created. Everything is being decided by adults, created by adults and young people have no choice.

Step 4 – Young people assigned and informed

Projects are initiated and run by adults, young people are informed and assigned with specific roles within. In this stage young people are also very aware and well informed about the limits they have within assigned roles.

Step 5 – Young people consulted and informed

Projects and initiatives are run by adults and young people are invited for consultation, provide suggestions and they are informed how this is taking place and what is their contribution the results.

Step 6 - Adult initiated shared decision making with young people

Projects are initiated and run by adults but young people are invited to share decision process and responsibilities over the results as equal partners.

Step 7 - Young people initiated and led action

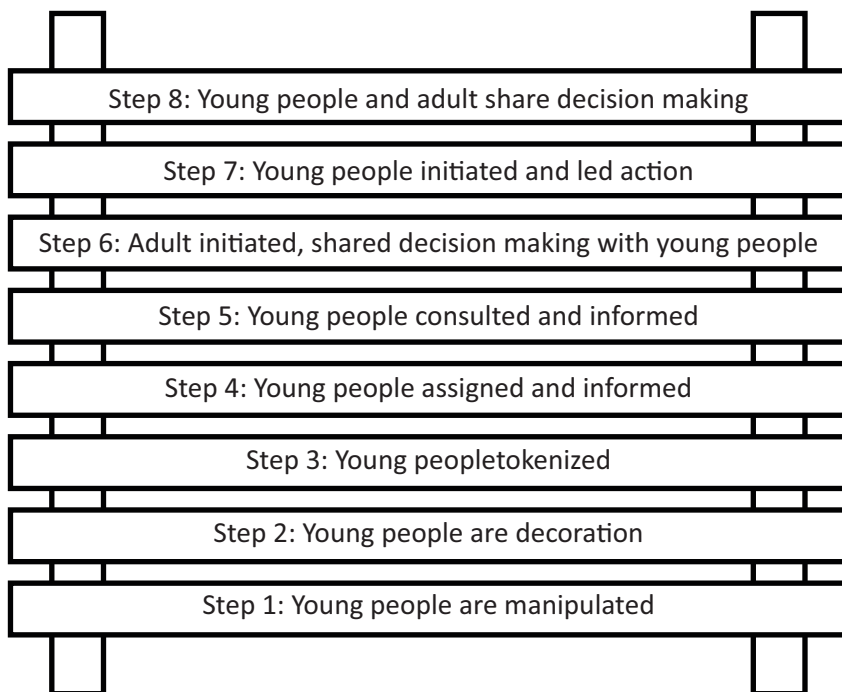
Projects and ideas are initiated and run by young people. Adults are sometime invited to support, but generally whole project can be done without them.

Step 8 - Young people and adult share decision making

Projects and ideas are initiated by young people who invite adults as equal partners in the project development and implementation.

The Hart's Ladder on participation is very useful tool for those practitioners with young people who want to take close look how participation of young people take place within their projects and organizations, but also how young people are participating in the community projects.

If combined with Triangle of Participation the Ladder help practitioner to observe and learn from young people participation and what one can do to improve it.



Let's think about:

- When you look at your project or your organization what would you say about your partnership with young people? Is it taking enough space? Are young people high enough on the ladders? What do you need to do to make them participating more effectively?
- When you look at your community and young people participation: is there partnership established or made functional, how the co-operation is taking place, are there ways to climb up the ladder for young people?
- If your organization or community is lacking youth participation, can you identify why or what are the reasons behind?



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

A great person attracts great people and knows how to hold them together.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Numerous programs in worldwide are treating youth leadership giving chances to young individuals and groups to gain skills, knowledge and experience in taking action, responsibility and ownership over their own tasks, community issues and bringing their peers into decision making process. Some of these are focussing on youth workers role in developing leadership skills among groups of young people.

By developing leadership skills young person develops their own empowerment within peer group but also youth empowerment within community. Developing these skills and having leadership experience young person grows into an active citizens, it brings them feeling of satisfaction with the fact that they are also contributing to their peer group and their community.

Young people participating in leadership training are more appreciated within their peers and within community while being young, but also afterward. They are developing more positive image of themselves too, becoming recognized within their community.

Youth work encourages young people to take responsibility for their actions / actions, giving them an active role in the development phase activities until their implementation. Youth work provides a comfortable, safe, inspiring and comfortable environment in which children and young people have the opportunity, either as individuals or as part of a group, to express themselves, learn from each other, meet, play, explore, and experimenting.

In addition, youth work provides young people with the opportunity to develop diverse personal and professional skills, without stereotypes what types, as well as key competences that can contribute to modern society. Therefore, youth work has an important role in empowerment, development of autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit among young people.

Throughout the decades of researches on the leadership in the world one can find different classification of leadership requiring different skills and knowledge.

It shows how each leader, including young people as leaders are developing their own leadership style.

While developing their leadership style young people are developing specific skills and knowledge to lead the group, project, initiative, their peers, organization, etc. They are taking specific role within their peer group and their community by dealing with some community issues and being part of solutions, leading solutions.

Let's think about:

- Do young people you work with have leadership skills?
- How do you recognize a leader among young people?
- How many young people do you see as leaders in your community?
- Working with young leaders requires skills and knowledge, what kind of skills would you like to develop within your organization team?
- What your local community thinks of young proactive people, taking leadership role?
- What young leaders in your community are most interested in? Why?
- What young leaders in your community are using when mobilizing other young people? How they do this?

According to some authors it is not only the style that makes young leader a leader, but also the role young person is willing to take it supporting her/his leadership style. Leadership style, being way a person uses her/his resources, skills, power in order to lead other people and processes.



Leadership styles

Being a leader for young person makes a difference in their professional and personal life. From the very beginning, a young person needs to be aware that being leader is about being part of the group, taking role, use their own skills, resources within group and supports other. By developing her/his leadership skills young person develops her/his own way to work with other young people recognizing issues in the community and actually making the change happen. In many cases it is the change that young people need in the local community.

Not everyone is ready to work with large teams, some people are lacking sense of responsibility, time management, resources management. But having one lack does not mean they cannot develop more other assets and be a great youth leader. It is about their own style.

Among many theories and leadership approaches applicable to young people to there are different styles of leadership in the community that young people can develop.

Autocratic leadership style is centered on the main person who acts as a kind of a boss. In this kind of leadership the leader holds all authority and responsibility, leaders make decisions on their own without consulting the group. Autocratic leadership style environment has little or no flexibility at all.

Democratic leadership style enables the groups to be involved in making decisions. Unlike autocratic, this leadership is focused to contributions from the team. The democratic leader holds final responsibility of the decision, she or he is known to other people, wider public if need for initiative. This style supports usage of horizontal and vertical communication in the team.

Laissez-faire leadership style gives authority to the team members. Leaders here offer a lot of space for team members to take decision process over, but also take responsibility. This kind of leadership has been consistently found to be the least satisfying and least effective style.

Let's think about:

What leadership style do you use when working with young people ? Why?

What leadership style do young people you work with use when working on

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN WESTERN BALKAN

The foundation of every state is the education of its youth. - Diogenes

According to the recent surveys in the region, the level of social, political and economic participation of youth in the Western Balkan is far behind the average values in the EU. For example, political participation index, showing the level of youth participation in political life, is highest in Montenegro and behind this country are Macedonia, Serbia, Albania. Political Participation Index is in almost all countries about 4 (2017). The targeted value given in the Council of Europe Agenda 2020 is 33,23. Youth Participation Index (2017) in economic field covering economic independence of young people, youth unemployment rate, labor force rate, NEET rate, self-employed young people is 4,69 in Serbia, 4,80 in Montenegro, 4,22 in North Macedonia, whilst the targeted value in EU according to Agenda 2020 of the Council of Europe is 42,4. However, progress achieved in youth participation in the Western Balkans has become increasingly evident. A significant number of CSOs dealing with youth participation have emerged in each of the WB countries. Number of organizations, initiatives and programs dealing with youth participation in each country are complemented with regional youth platforms for cooperation and European youth programs. Many organizations, schools and young individuals are using different platforms to learn, gain experience, meet others and develop themselves into active citizens.

In last few years most popular are Erasmus Plus program, European solidarity Corps and Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

In addition, there are regional co-operation platforms in the Western Balkan region such as SEEYN network: <https://www.seeyn.org/>, ALDA with its Balkan Network for Local Democracy: <http://www.alda-balkan-youth.eu/> Western Balkan Youth Co-operation Platform: <http://www.connecting-youth.org/home.php>). Even more important are the country based umbrella organizations and local organizations who are integrating the youth participation into local context and practice.

Both regional networks and national/local organizations are contributing in different ways to development of young individuals, organizations and communities, but contributing to youth policy development and youth work development in the region.

Let's think about:

- How do young people in your community use international opportunities to participate?
- Do you and your organization support young people in regional and international youth exchanges? How do you do that?
- What difference does it make for a young person to be part of regional and international platforms?
- What resources and capacities an organization needs to be able to support local, regional and international participation of youth?
- How do you perceive your organization and yourself as professional in working on youth participation within your community, your country and region?
- What skills and resources you think you need to develop more? h participation, can you identify why or what are the reasons behind?



BALKAN REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue aims at increasing awareness on youth participation, youth activism and the possibilities of young people creating and influencing the policies closely related to them. One of the goals of the Platform is to improve cooperation and the coordination between Civil Society (CS) and the public authorities with the active participation of youngsters, through the creation Regional Network for Local Democracy. Easing youth activism and participation and raising the awareness of local authorities, policy and decision makers, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and youth leaders in targeted countries on EU standards, policies and practices on youth participation is the main scope of every activity within the platform. Open dialogue between youth and stakeholders in their communities but also in Balkan region countries is the main objective and position of youth, which the creation of the platform seeks to achieve.

The creation of the platform through planned activities organized and implemented at grassroots, national and regional level, aims at favouring participation and social inclusion of youth, particularly under represented youth with fewer opportunities. Fundamental for this is the experience and expertise of ALDA and the Balkan LDAs with the ability to achieve capacity building and enhanced networking of the youth within the platform. Almost 20 years of experience of the partners in local democracy and open dialogues on European level was used into designing this program tailored specifically as sprout of self-sustainable network with strong dissemination, all with the goal of achieving increscent of youth participation with EU standards.

Starting with the activities which are constant and ongoing, appointed towards the enhancement of the network, such as steering group meetings, foundation of specific teams, research and comparative analysis, capacity building trainings, and know-how transfer of positive practices, the platform creates a basis for further enlargement.

Regional activities, commonly developed by all the partners in the platform aim at awareness raising and visibility as one of the objectives, are mainly focused on campaigning and information dissemination actions. Additionally, the platform is implementing study visits, publishing newsletters on the activities, implementing online campaigns, established social media channels activities and advocacy and lobbying activities on local level with authorities.

The idea on the regional activities is also to focus on exchange of good practices among countries in the region.

On the other hand, the local activities, implemented in each participating community by LDAs and their associate public authorities are focusing on the relevance for local youth.

These activities are creating the path for open dialogue on local level through actions by local youth in coordination with the local authorities and other local youth platforms.

BALKAN REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE TOOLS



Entire Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue was developed in order to join forces and bring young people into position to take important and significant role in decision making within their local community. During the establishment of the platform partners were inviting young people to participation through different tools.

Making it very practical place to practice process of participation practitioners and experts within the platform team offered young people placements where they can practice, gain experience and implement this experience local.

Regional Youth Working Group (RYWG)

Local young people nominated by local partner team were appointed members of the regional youth working group focusing on evaluation of the network strategy and activities both on regional and local level. On this way group of 16 young people from the region are directly participating in platforms development, decision making and advising Steering group of the project.

Throughout Skype and in person meetings young people are participating and supporting regional platform giving it a youth friendly approach and setting a tone of the platform from local youth perspective.

Members of the RYWG are responsible for the production of 4 regional newsletters on youth participation and coordinate regional internet awareness raising campaign of the platform. Furthermore, this group has obligation to cooperate with local groups of young people and bring their voice and perspective in activities of the platform.

Youth Engagement Workers (YEW)

Group of 16 people, 2 per community proposed by project team and approved by Steering group of the project aims direct and close cooperation with local project managers. This team is providing support to young people locally and regionally involved in the activities. This group of professionals are working as mentors, trainers and supporting evaluation of activities young people are part of.



Local Youth Advisory Group (LYAG)

In each participating community Local Youth Advisory Group acts as a link between youth in the community and members of the regional network. YEW is closely working with LYAG and cooperating in defining selection criteria for participants in regional and local activities and public events, conducting local researches. LYAG also provides inputs for regional newsletter and regional Youth Web Hub.



Info points

Information tool established throughout of establishment of the platform in each of the participating community – eight (8) of them are now operating as local voluntary youth info services. Having in mind that participating communities are not main urban centres, such services were the first of their kind and attracted youth who, up until then, didn't have the opportunity to receive information on educational and mobility programs, with special focus on Erasmus + programme. Info points are implementing online training for young people too.

Youngsters within each Info point (total of 16-24 people) are participating as youth correspondents working on the production of written and video news content. Youth correspondents produce reportages on youth related topics from each participating community. Their joint work is presented in the regional web platform and provides opportunity for cross – cultural view on one topic and comparing the situation in 8 communities from the region.



Local Youth Initiatives

Even not being a new tool, young people developing their own local initiatives as a tool for making the co-operation platform work can make a difference since their work includes communication and advocacy towards the local authorities. This specifically refers to advocating for the municipal funding to be more favorable for social inclusion of youth with fewer opportunities. This fund primarily aims to motivate and support youth initiatives from informal groups of youngsters who are usually inactive in any official structure.



Youth Taking Over Day

This tool was developed by platform team in order to enable young people to take on the shoes of local policy/decision makers. This activity was developed, piloted and implemented in variety of forms by local LDAs and local authorities on annual basis. Different groups of 15 youngsters had an opportunity to meet their local Councilors, interact with them and express their needs and concerns. In this way young people could understand better the decision making process and how the public policy is being made, they could propose ideas for improving local services and strategies. Young councilors are aiming to define concrete recommendations from youth point of view to be presented and discussed in regional annual Forums meeting with the aim to incorporate them into policy recommendations.



Mycity - Youth city

Tool that was used by each participating partner in local community yearly in order to raise awareness with public authorities into the formal or informal community planning process. The tool can be used to focus on different topic each year, from artistic, cultural participation to inclusive education. This participatory process engages groups of young people in exploring their attitudes and artistic expressions related with their physical and social environment. Ideas brought within this tool is presented in local Assembly sessions or to Local Youth Offices and thus becoming a youth voice heard in the local community.



Youth art programme

As tool in which young people who are less interested into direct decision making have chance to participate and express their opinion through out series of workshops locally. Added value of this tool is that is youth participatory and youth led. Combining youth participation and youth leadership this tool offers youth friendly space for young people to speak out about the issues important to them. Products are documented and are part of Youth Art Tour, regional tour of multimedia art products hosted in each participating community.



Job Shadowing programme

Job Shadowing as tool is not new tool, but in the context of Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue was organized as a regional intercultural exchange programme engaging both the local partner and local authorities.

Young people taking part in the programme are engaged for two weeks in a daily activities of local Youth offices or other official local structures working with youth. On this way young people and youth workers are directly working with dictions makers on daily basis understanding procedures and process of the institutional work with youth.



My city – InterCultural city

Research tool implemented by a group of 10 youngsters in each participating community about the elements of other cultures present in their community (from names of streets entitled to prominent historical and cultural persons of different nationalities belonging to the culture of other WB countries to cultural monuments and historical sites connected to other cultures). Cultural awareness campaign presenting the results of this research by the young people. As a part of campaign youngsters share their favorite cultural practices in their local community. The objective of the campaign is to raise cultural awareness in the local communities and improve the general perception about cultural practices among youngsters in the region.

Additional to presented tools Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue has used more traditional tools for development of youth participation: Exchange of Youth Correspondents - to enable intercultural learning for the Youth Correspondents while strengthening connections between young people and regional inter-cultural exchange between different communities across WB countries.



International Youth Day celebration

Marking International Youth Day throughout youth participation by setting up a stand in public square and inviting out other youth via megaphone to have their saying on youth issues in all partner communities. This tool and activity has two aims: one is symbolical, to show a necessity to provide tools and mechanisms for youngsters to raise their voice and to have opportunity to be active participants in social life, and second aim is that through one non-formal mechanism reach larger number of young people and to gather significant amount of inputs regarding improvement quality of life of young people in communities involved.



Let's think about:

- Do you use Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue tools?
- Do you know if you, your organization and youth groups become part of the platform?
- What tool of the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth and Dialogue do you find most participatory for young people?
- Which tool you would like to implement with group of young people within your community?



Best platform for youth participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in process of decision making is youth policy platforms. Unfortunately as many other things in BiH this platform is also divided into entity levels. All of them are including direct youth participation, youth workers and young people as leaders and youth participation within strategy approach they are taking.

Youth Council of Republic of Srpska – is umbrella youth organization in Republic of Srpska representing local youth councils, their members and youth organization operating in the whole territory of Republic of Srpska (e.g. students union organization; Red Cross youth organization, etc). The mission of the Youth Council of Republic of Srpska is to represent youth issues to decision making process. It is registered in accordance of Law on Youth Organizing of Republic of Srpska and it is the oldest youth council in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In order for young person to have her/his idea to be heard by decision maker they can become part of local youth council and share their opinion on local level. These issues can be delegated to entity youth council through umbrella organization.

Youth Council of Federation of BiH - is umbrella youth organization in Federation of BiH, representing young people from FBiH in decision making process on this level of governance. It is established in accordance to Youth Law FBiH by 6 Canton Youth Councils representing local youth councils and local organization. About 1000 young people from local communities are directly involved in youth councils work.

In order to delegate certain issue young person from local community needs to become part of local organization and use youth council platform to have her/his opinion heard in local authorities or on the higher levels of youth council platform. On this way local ideas come to parliamentary level of decision making in Federation of BiH.

Youth Council of Brcko District BiH – is youngest youth umbrella organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, established in accordance to Youth Law of Brcko District in December 2018. It represents young people's issues coming from the territory of Brcko District BiH. This umbrella organization is established by local youth organizations.

KOSOVO* YOUTH PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS

Youth participation in Kosovo* is regulated by the legal framework in The Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth. There is several process within youth policy development in the recent history done by respectful ministry, but most of effective participation models of young people depends on youth activism and participation of youth organizations.

The Central Youth Action Council of Kosovo (CYAC) - is promoting the rights of young people and to ensure that strong collective voice of young people heard to policy and decision makers at all levels. Activities of the CYAC include research, representation to government, participation in youth policy design & implementation, awareness campaigns, and youth exchanges.

The Kosovo Youth Network (KYN) - is an independent body representing 127 youth organizations and youth centres throughout Kosovo.

The Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) – is a youth platform whose primary role is to creating and supporting youth organizations, engaging young men and women in the change making processes, strengthening their capacities, representing their voices, promoting self-organized education and supporting development of youth policies.

SERBIA - YOUTH PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS

Similar as in other countries participating in Balkan platform for youth participation and dialogue in Republic of Serbia the best way for young person to address their issues to decision makers is youth policy platform. In Serbia, youth participation is organized differently but still the idea is that young people have their voice heard and values within youth policy development.

KOMS - is a coalition of the national organizations and an advocacy platform representing the interests of young people, provides learning platforms for active participation and developing systematic approaches in order to improve the situation of young people through the development of strategic partnerships, cross-sectoral and international cooperation.

Another example of efficient ways for enabling young people to participate in development of the society is structural dialogue platforms. KOMS has established online and offline platform www.dijalog.rs for structural dialogue where young people can participate equally to decision makers. is a continuous process of consultation between young people and decision-makers in order to jointly define and implement policies relevant to youth at all levels. Structured dialogue ensures active participation of young people in decision-making processes by giving them the opportunity to freely express their opinions and recommendations, thus contributing to the improvement of the position of young people.

NORTH MACEDONIA YOUTH PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS

The youth in North Macedonia, as in other countries in the region, is very often treated as a problem rather than a powerful resource that can make significant political, social, cultural and economic change in the society.

The National Youth Council of Macedonia NYCM - is a youth umbrella organization - a union of associations and foundations in the Republic of Macedonia by 55 founding organizations. NYCM is a non-governmental, non-partisan and nonprofit organization and represent the interests and needs of young people as a liaison to all stakeholders to ensure involvement and active participation of youth in decision-making at every level.

MLADI.MK is a web platform for informing the young people and enables room for direct communication among organizations, institutions and young people for promoting different opportunities and sharing relevant information.

MONTENEGRO YOUTH PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS

Montenegro has no national youth council established the respectful and assigned ministry for youth and CSO's dealing with youth issues managed to have participatory approach in creating Youth policy 2017-2021. The process of drafting of Youth Strategy has been led by the Directorate for Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Education. Youth policy is devised, developed, implemented, monitored and its achievements are evaluated with concrete participation of young people.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN BALKAN REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

When asked about their own experience on youth participation and how they become part of the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue young people were answering in different style but with same vision. Thus, according to received answers the platform managed to develop and deliver unique values and principles of youth participation to the participants and team members. When asked why youth participation is important to them majority answers were referring to possibility for meeting up with other young people, reaching out to the region trough the platform. Other answers recognizes specific youth issues of their own interested addressed by the platform and several young people think that youth participation is about their voice to be heard and valued.

Through youth participation, young people are trying to improve their position and to improve the country they live in, but also to improve their own skills which will make them more adequate on labor market.

It's important because it gives a chance for our voice to reach the people who make decisions and convince them to include us in that process.

If youngsters don't fight for ourselves, who will?

Young people who participated in the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue mostly say how their motivation to participate was invitation of already recognized youth worker in their community, youth organization or their friend. Once again is shows that youth friendly approach within the platform made significant step for some of young people to participate. This youth friendly approach made difference for young people in participation within the platform in comparison to other previous experiences of participation. It brought skill and knowledge development for their personal and professional life, brought youth participation concepts closer to their local realities and enriched and spread their cultural horizons.

I didn't realize how rich we are, all Balkan western countries because we have very smart, sharp and kind young people. We can work together if there is good projects like one is. I start to think different about my local community because I didn't know on which way our municipality works and after meetings with local stakeholders I have open my mind view and I will fight more for youth ideas to get implemented in my municipality.

It showed me the beauty of working with culturaly different people, helped me to personally develop and taught me the beauty of youth work.

First of all, I grew up with this project. Second, I meet a lot of people, a lot different characters and mentality, I see something new. New in the sense, I traveled a lot, new contries, new people, new religion, new languages. I learned a lot, and any knowledge made me a better and more tolerant person.

In future participants would like to use gained experience in making improvements in their own local community, they understand working with peers and local young people. Mostly appreciation within the platform showed intercultural aspects of the all tools used in the platform. The fact that they had chance to participate and to do it with other young people made them challenged but very keen and motivated. Most of the answers came from young people from Local Youth Advisory Group and Regional Youth Working Group.



EXPERTS POINT OF VIEW ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN BALKAN REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

The platform included different professionals in its setup, development, promotion, implementation of platforms tools and research. Professionals and experts point of view on youth participation is extremely important for future of the platform but also for mutual understanding of implemented concepts so far. How we see young people's participation is how we see youth practitioners are actually giving opportunities to young people. All experts participating in the platform are making difference of their own perception of youth participation in comparison to how youth participation is perceived in their community by decision makers and general society.

When I think about my community I will describe the youth participation as a constant struggle to be involved in the decision-making process and to influence the policy makers, equally support the good policies and critique the bad ones, lobbying for the ideas the young people have and recognizing their importance and role in the society.

In my community, youth participation is hard and not very satisfactory because of the political and employment situations.

Great energy with poor opportunities to engage. Apathy, lack of perspective - hope for better future, mixed-disturbed values... Lack of permanent programs, especially in smaller communities.

The necessity of the platform is very obvious in expert's answers on recognition of other local and country initiatives and tools dealing properly with youth participation in decision making process. None of the experts recognized established protocols and mechanisms from youth laws and implemented by respectful authorities. Many of these recommendations would be in very low stage in Harts Ladder of participation. Additionally, more than half experts stated that in local community they only trust Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue as only worth real effort and the one that actually give chances to young people.

Over 60% of responses show that the experts in the field of youth participation are of the opinion that the biggest challenge is youth motivation. They are lacking ideas, skills and resources to motivate young people to take proactive role in the community. In addition to the fact that local communities mostly do not perceive young people as a resource but rather as an issue, it is important to understand the principles of youth participation and the leadership roles as perceived by the young people themselves, but also to further develop youth practitioners' skills.

When I think about my community I Youth participation is tool to use all sources to animate youth to be useful for local benefits. In shorter way youth participation is way of how to wake up youth in our communities.

I would say that participation means to be active in your local society. Not only in terms of NGO activities and policy making process, but in cultural, artistic, sport and other kinds of events as well. Also not only to be a participant, but to make initiatives and try to change something.

Youth participation is exchange of idea with incredible people who are prepared to do a lot for greater good.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Understanding the concept of youth participation in the Balkans is still weak and requires additional information share, learning process, education and practice. This refers both to decision makers and young people as societal groups.

Decision makers do not see youth participation as an important element in policy/ decision making and young people are mostly perceiving participation as circumstances where adults invite them to express their opinion that is not valued. On the other hand, young people see their participation in youth exchanges and such activities as full participation too. It shows that there is a significant need for continuous development and adjustments of youth oriented participatory tools focusing on young people's recognition in the society.

Youth workers and youth policy experts are stating that they are lacking tools for strengthening youth motivation to participate. They find the level of motivation of young people to participate the biggest challenge. When combined with an ongoing brain drain and such a perception of participation in the society it is more than necessary for the youth workers in the Balkans to create a co-operation platform for knowledge and information share, for developing their professional skills and learning new ones, bringing forward new, innovative solutions in response to traditional perceptions of youth participation in social, economic and political life in these countries.

Youth sector in the Balkans seems to have become increasingly project oriented, with only few long-term programmes aimed at youth participation at local and country levels. Capacity building and organizational development of the youth sector in order to improve the knowledge, information and competences is more than necessary in order to create preconditions for youth participation and build trust between the young generation and public institutions.

Youth sector policy development differs in each of the countries included. In many communities across the region neither the youth workers nor the young people can see their own role in this process. It is necessary to enhance the policy dialogue space, make it more youth friendly and continuously build partnership relations between local youth and public authorities.

Empowering and encouraging young people in the Balkans to participate more in different aspects of life of the local community requires more youth friendly approaches and profound understanding of the youth participation by all the stakeholders.

E-participation and the use of modern IT tools has not yet been sufficiently applied to encourage youth engagement and participation. Not only that E-participation tools development and their proper use could attract larger number of young people but they would also help bring youth participation to a higher level of effectively influencing the policy making process.



RESOURCES

The list of web resources used:

The Council of Europe

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Coe_youth/CoE_and_young_people_en.asp

UN Youth Agenda Empowering youth for development and peace

www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/agenda.htm

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

The Partnership <http://pjeu.coe.int/en/web/youthpartnership/home>

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The Institute for Youth Development KULT www.mladi.org

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National Youth Council of Macedonia

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KOMS – National Youth Umbrella Association of Serbia www.koms.rs

NAPOR – National Association of Youth Workers of Serbia www.napor.net

Structure dialogue in Serbia - www.dijalog.sr

Youth Council FBiH - www.vijecemladih.ba

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Make contact – connect guide, Zdravo da ste

<http://proni.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Partnerships-in-youth-work-Make-contact-connect.pdf>

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Izborna lektira M1,

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