

Youth policy and research in Slovakia

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Abstrakt

Vedeckí pracovníci sú občania, ktorí majú v procese posilňovania demokratického vládnutia v EU veľkú zodpovednosť. Sú to občania, ktorí v dôsledku svojej profesijnej činnosti majú hlboké poznatky o komplikovanej problematike procesov prechodu mladých ľudí do práce a spoločnosti. Majú teda kompetenciu nielen informovať a interpretovať čo sa deje s mladými ľuďmi v Európe, ale aj legitímne ovplyvňovať tvorbu koncepcie európskej mládežníckej politiky. Neznačí to však robiť "politické rozhodnutia" v mládežníckej politike štátu alebo verejnej politike mládeže, ale dobre si plniť svoje analyticko-výskumné a expertno-poradenské poslanie. Myšlienka „magického trianguľa“ či „tripartity“ je na Slovensku už realitou. Už dekádu sme svedkami toho, že na scéne mládežníckej politiky je nenápadný „aktér“. Pomáha formovať dlhodobé programy alebo pripraviť konkrétne projekty práce s mládežou. Spoluutvára verejnú mienku o súčasnej mladej generácii. Pomáha legitimizovať jej záujmy v nových dokumentoch: Zákon NR SR o podpore práce s mládežou a dokument vlády SR Kľúčové oblasti a akčné plány štátnej politiky vo vzťahu k deťom a mládeži v SR na roky 2008-2013.

Abstract

Scientific experts are citizens who have great responsibility in the process of empowering of the democratic governance in the EU. They are citizens who, in consequence of their professional activity, have deep knowledge about complicated problems of the process of transition of young people to employment and society. They have the competence to influence the creation of conception of European youth politics. It does not mean to make "political decisions" but to fulfill their analytical-research and counseling mission. The idea of "magic triangle" is a reality in Slovakia. For a decade, we have witnessed inconspicuous "participant" on the scene of youth politics. It helps to form long-term programs or to prepare particular projects for work with the youth. It contributes to shape public opinion about present-day young generation. It helps to legitimize its interests in new documents such as the Law about Support of Work with Youth and the document of Slovak government called Crucial Areas and Action Plans of State Politics in Relation to Children and Youth in Slovakia for 2008-2013.

Keywords: youth research, EU, Slovakia, citizenship

1. Youth research before and after the EU entry

In central and eastern Europe, which was connected by the common history of communist regime, the youth research was represented for a long time by large research centres and institutions. Their activities were planned and fully funded state: the results were large researches of representative character, where youth was perceived as „builder of bright future“. Later, the image of youth in research changed and interest was concentrated on contradiction between aspirations of young people and limited job opportunities (80's).¹

Social changes at the beginning of 90's brought new phenomena as for examples prolongation of youth period, wiping out the clear age limits among childhood, youth and adulthood, individualisation of youth. Positive perception of youth as the source of social development was embossed by specific problems of marginalised groups of young people (young homeless, drug addicts, religion movements and others). Youth was perceived as the most risk social group of transformation and modernisation after 1989, which as a social group is not only a source of problems for society, but even endangered it.

The second half of 90's brought the formation boom of different centres, agencies, specialised university departments and informal international networks focused on the topic of youth research.

Methodologically the research is characterised by wide scale of new topics, ideas, approaches; national and international researches are accompanied by case studies, focus groups and others. With regard to possibilities of funding, the youth research was concentrated on themes, which arose from popularity of comparison studies (financed from various funds, private foundations, but also from European Commission and Council of Europe) and not from

¹ Although first significant works on youth research can be found from the interwar period (prof. Alojz Chura: Slovakia without teenagers; 1937-1939)¹ or during the years 1964-1968 (prof. A. Jurovský: Cultural development of youth, prof. J. Čečetka: Socialisation of youth), new impulses for youth research has came after the 1989 revolution.

problems, which were specific for given country and period – due to lack of domestic financial sources.²

Slovakia has tradition in situating the coordination of youth policy into the agenda of Ministry of Education. The Department for youth and children has been working at the Ministry of Education since 1988 and has been trying to get information on realised and planned research tasks in the scope of youth and even has prepared concept of youth research at that time.³ In 1992 the document „Principles of state policy in relation to youth in Slovakia“, which was adopted by the government of the Slovak Republic on January 7th 1992 says, that the state will „support the development of academic research of youth and use its results in supporting the needs of youth and in accordance with intentions of state policy towards youth.“⁴

On the other side, this period was relatively difficult for the department as it was permanently criticised for representing and promoting old state-paternalistic youth policy and its effort on certain „planned“ research of youth was still perceived as an organic part of old manipulating practises in the youth work.

This apparent inconsistency resulted from the stabilization process of political system in Slovakia, in which the relations of state and civil society were changing and priorities were changing according to coalition agreements and defining the main goals in area of education and youth. The position of researchers was truly problematic, because they published impartially academically justified themes and rational conceptional recommendations for improving the youth work regardless of actual direction of overall policy of ruling coalition in the scope of youth policy.

Experts from pedagogical-research and scientific-research institutions, who entered the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Youth council of Slovakia:

1. had a possibility to present the results of their research work not only in scientific magazines (Sociology, Pedagogical revue, Psychology and patopsychology of child), but also in

² Kovacheva, S. (2005): *Reflection on the Situation of Youth Reserach in Central and Eastern Euirope*, p. 73 – 81. In: Central European Dimension of Youth Research, CENYR The Central European Dimension of Youth Research, Trnava.

³ Youth and Society 1990 - 1992.

⁴ Principles of youth policy in Slovakia 1992,

the magazine for state policy and youth work „Youth and society“, which was published by the Ministry of Education in the Institute for information and prognosis in Bratislava since 1990.

2. had a possibility to give lectures on principal conceptional papers at academic conferences organised by important academic societies, but also at seminars and workshops, which were organised by the department for children and youth of Ministry of Education and Youth council of Slovakia.

3. these lectures were published in the magazines „Youth forum“ (YCS) and INFOIUVENTA, in volumes and methodical materials for non-formal education of wide circuit of young people operating in youth associations as well as adults operating in the leisure time centres for children and youth or in associations for children work.⁵

Many experts – researchers were working for a certain time at the department for youth of Ministry of Education or vice versa, professional youth workers – referents were working in the research, eventually students and graduates of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, journalism, politology and social work started their work in civil associations for youth and occupied important positions in Youth council of Slovakia (P. Júza, B. Ondruš, F. Vagač, R. Dikant). Professional competences of all people concerned in youth policy – politicians and youth leaders – were improving.⁶

The department for youth at Ministry of Education appointed prof. Macháček as the first correspondent for youth research in the Council of Europe. Thanks to initiative of Council of Europe the analysis of situation in the scope of youth policy and youth work after 1989 was prepared. Prof. Macháček actively participated on survey creation, created network between Mr. Ola Stafseng and „scientific-research cabinets“ for interviews and provided available literature in English language. This resulted in publication of Council of Europe, which contained several

⁵ Conference organized by the German Youth Institute (Munich), Ministry of Education of Slovakia and Local council of town Trenčín: „Learning from each other: local projects for young people in Slovakia and Germany“ Trenčín 8th – 12th July 2000.

⁶ Macháček, L. (2008): *Metamorphoses of the relations between policymakers and researchers in the youth research field in Slovakia*. Trnava: University of Trnava.

reports on situation of youth movement in new European democracies⁷ and provided first summary on situation for experts in Europe and Slovak public.

Whereas Slovakia has never had any specialised research institution for youth as for example in Germany or Austria, miscellaneous scientific societies operating (pedagogical, psychological) at Slovak academy of sciences have taken important role dedicating attention to young academic researchers and youth research. The youth section at Slovak sociology society traditionally takes part in coordination among research, youth civil associations and government. There are several researchers and experts for youth field (P. Ondrejko, E. Kratochvílová, A. Tokárová, J. Hroncová, A. Brozmanova-Gregorova).

From 2002 to 2007 the Conception of state policy towards children and youth was implemented, which emphasised the importance of professional research and gathering of information, that are necessary for active and modern youth policy. Conception of state policy towards children and youth defines needs and optimal conditions for quality education and professional training of young people, their involvement into social life and for development of competences and talent in the frame of school education and also outside of school. Special attention is given to revitalisation of pedagogical research as well as information gathering towards young people with health disabilities in regard to preparation for future career and labour integration. The conception anticipated establishing National institute for children and youth with special tasks in the scope of research.⁸

Especially the year 2008 was rich in legislative work, which adjusted the position of „knowledge and understanding of youth“ in the context of youth policy.

1. **Act on support of the youth work (Act No. 282/2008)** has come into force on September 1st 2008. The law guarantees improved conditions for forming young people as active citizens, who participate in the quality of their own life. The law determines the tasks of counties and municipalities in relation to youth work. Accreditation commission of specialised activities in the scope of youth work is being established, which is going to be a consultative body in

⁷ Young People and Associations in Europe: M. Vanandruel, P. Amario, O. Stafsgang and P. Tap, Strassbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 1996

⁸ Ministry of Education SR (2001): *Conception of the state policy towards children and youth until 2007*, p. 20, 25, 34.

relation to recognition of non-formal learning. Ministry of Education is obliged to create „legal, organisational, research and economical conditions for youth work development.“⁹

2. Key areas and action plans of state policy towards children and youth in Slovakia for 2008 – 2013 was approved by government decision no. 184 on March 26th 2008. Key area define aims, principles and priority fields of government, counties and other subjects‘ in selected scopes of children and youth life. They also name the basic tasks of structures participating in executing and describe steps that will guarantee their effective fulfilment.¹⁰

3. Action plan of youth policy for 2008 – 2009¹¹ is the latest document, which especially in thematic parts Education, Information and communication technologies, Employment and Youth participation on social and political life not only emphasises the necessity of systematic information gathering as the basic material for modern youth policy creation, but also name the concrete steps to achieve this goal together with responsible institutions and subjects (ministries, counties, Iuventa – Slovak Youth Institute, Youth council of Slovakia and others)

Action plan has an ambition to support such research and exploration activities, that will allow to define policy measures in relation to children and youth at local, regional and national level on the basis of relevant and accurate information, whereas action plans of implementation will predict future issue development , contain children and youth expectations and reflect their needs. Proposed measures are for example:

- active preparation of data for European youth policy knowledge centre (EKCYP) and dissemination of these materials to public;
- seminars on key policy areas and research for period until 2010;
- direct support of research in absention areas of youth knowledge;
- preparation of further research development strategy in Slovakia;

⁹ Act on support o youth work:

http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/DetiMladez/KMAT/2008/20080926_Zc_282_2008.pdf .

¹⁰ Key areas and action plans of youth policy in Slovak Republic for 2008 –2013, from
://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/DetiMladez/KMAT/2008/20080326_klucove_oblasti.pdf, 15th October 2008

¹¹ Action plan of youth policy in Slovakia 2008 -2009,

http://www.iuventa.sk/index.php?www=sp_file&id_item=378 z 15th October 2008.

- network creation politicians – researchers – youth representatives and their communication and consultations on current themes (2008 – regional policy towards children and youth, 2009 – position and life of young people in current society).

Although official conditions are created, there has not been long history of consultation at creating various documents, that's why participating of young people in decision making is not an automatic process. It is not easier to cooperate with researchers and politicians. Slovak researchers mainly deal with questions that are interesting from the point of view of research. Regular youth monitoring is missing, which can provide basic information on most important areas of youth life, politicians see researches to be too little connected to their agenda. The way the researchers present their results is often too complicated and scientific for politicians to be used in their everyday work and decision making.

2. Agenda of institutions and their place in better knowledge and understanding of Slovak youth

There has not been any significant change in structures providing youth research recently. As there is not an institution completely covering youth research or collecting the data in Slovakia (as for example German youth institute in Munchen, www.dji.de), youth research takes place in various governmental and nongovernmental institutions. Basic demographic data and some other investigation are realised by Statistical office of the Slovak Republic (www.statistics.sk). Youth, as a specific group is not under a systematic watch, but from available demographic and school data, Institute for information and prognosis annually publishes yearbook on children and youth.

No Slovak University has specialized pedagogical-research institute (department, establishment) only for youth research issues. Faculty and University institutes are intended as centres for basic research in particular sciences. Philosophical or Social-political faculties run Departments of sociology, politology, pedagogy, psychology, ethnology and social work that work as such centres. Sporadically graduate PhD studies are noted in the field of youth (at Departments of politology, sociology or ethnology). More often we can find such studies at

Departments of psychology (development psychology) and pedagogy (social pedagogy, pedagogy of leisure time).

The most significant capacity of pedagogical-research projects concentrated children and youth issues is situated at pedagogical faculties. However, research in scope of teaching theory (didactics) predominates over theory of education and problems in school environment (for example chicanery) or in family, or in free time of young adolescents. Universities that have pedagogical faculties are: University Comenius in Bratislava, University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica, Prešov University, University of Konštantín the philosopher in Nitra, Trnava University, Catholic university in Ružomberok, University of P. J. Šafárik in Košice.

Departments of social work are relatively new components in the structure of pedagogical or health faculties. They prepare experts for social work in various scopes of social life as well as in the system of youth work. So they devote time to academic-research and publication activities in the scope of youth (for example solving youth drug addiction, prevention, social-educational problems of youth and solutions, unemployment, counselling, social participation....).

The only exception form above-mentioned is the Centre for European a regional youth research (CERYS) at Faculty of Philosophy at Cyril and Method University in Trnava, which has co-operated on some important sociological research projects of European Commission: EYI – Youth and European identity (2002-2004), EUYOUTHPART – political participation of young people (2004-2006), UP2YOUTH – youth as the factor of social change. (2006-2009).

Research institutes established by Ministry of Education have special status in the scope of youth research.

- Institute of information and prognosis (UIPŠ): www.uips.sk. Research in the scope of youth concentrates on civil associations' activities, youth information centres, school institutes (for example Leisure time centres and other), sport, camps and events, projects regarding drug prevention, counselling, publication (see 3.4.)
- Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (VÚDPaP) www.vudpap.sk is the only institute dealing with complex research of mental evolution of children in normal and

pathology developments and conditions that influence this evolution and possibilities of optimisation.

- National institute for pedagogy www.statpedu.sk deals with research, verifying and executing projects (IEA or OECD international studies are important, for example PISA)

Slovak academy of sciences operates in the Slovak Republic, which has specialised system of academic-research institutes (see www.sav.sk) solving research projects contributing to better knowledge of social conditions of youth life:

- Institute of sociology
- Institute of politology
- Institute of experimental psychology
- Ethnological institute
- Institute of prognosis
- Department of research for social and biological communication

The youth issue occurs in programs of academic-research institutes belonging to other ministries than Ministry of Education. The most important institutes are:

Institute for Labour and Family Research (2006) (www.sspr.gov.sk) - Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

Department of population statistics at Statistical office of the Slovak Republic

<http://portal.statistics.sk>

Third sector organisations and private academic and research agencies play unchangeable role in research institution range:

- Institute for public affairs, think tank organization: independent centre for analysis of public policy issues in several areas (research, publication activities, generation of ideas, which are able to influence public policy)

- FOCUS agency www.focus-research.sk: evaluation of EU YOUTH programme, project organisations and participants, gathering of other sociological data
- SPACE www.nspace.sk: Social policy analysis centre – projects, education, training, conferences, research, information
- GFK Agency www.gfk.com: research on youth (life style, youth law)
- CVEK www.cvek.sk: Centre for the research of ethnicity and culture, problems of multicultural society, intolerance and racism

Some children and youth nongovernmental organisation prepare and carry out own research or have practical knowledge on youth needs and expectations:

- Youth council of Slovakia www.mladez.sk: research on leisure time; research how young people are informed and organised
- YMCA: www.ymca.sk: Surveys on value of volunteer experience among human resources managers of various companies
- Erko, Scouting Slovakia, Red cross and other organization carries out surveys for finding out needs and expectations of members, activities evaluation and identifying future direction.

4. **Exchange and structured dialogue among various actors**

One of the first informal dialogue initiative between research and decision structures was the above mentioned Council of Europe research in 1996, which led to publication *Young People and Associations in Europe*. This helped to revive and stabilised informal relations among experts (prof. Macháček) and Children and youth department of the Ministry of Education.

Situation has begun to change in 2001, when Ministry of Education joined a new wave of research counselling activities of Council of Europe focused on the areas of state policy functioning. It resulted in complex **report on state policy towards youth**, which was one the

first document characterising state of this scope.¹² It was initiative of Ministry of Education and youth association with goal to organise and unify all subjects of youth policy and work with youth, demonstrating its legitimacy and its importance among other areas of state policy.

At the same time these research activities were held in other European countries, for example in Cyprus. Slovak Republic expected that diagnostics of youth policy subjects' potential „from outside“ could pronounce the truth about weak points of youth policy. It also brought the expectation, that Slovak government would have to deal with this specific „minor“ policy and finally adopt systematic decision, for example through a law on youth work.

Great organisation effort resulting from acceptance of this initiative in Strasbourg has considerable influenced the transformation of „coincidental and informal cooperation network“ into relatively more stabile „working cooperation network“ especially between government and experts – researchers dealing with youth issues. Documents preparation for analysis and evaluation of government youth policy in Slovakia has required new initiations and at the same time the team of traditional experts has widen up for younger experts from unconventional sciences and subjects.¹³

A painful finding from evaluation of A. Azzopardi's expert group showed, that the weakest point of Slovak youth policy was the youth research. The conclusion of 2004 European Commission survey action is also valid for Slovakia, namely that many EU countries does not have enough information on youth and decisions that are adopted at national level are carried out having poor knowledge and understanding of young generation needs.¹⁴

During preparation of National report on youth policy in Slovakia and during consultation with expert group members of Council of Europe on youth research situation, or during discussions on the presented report on youth participation in Slovakia for European Commission (2005) it was found out, that the number of researchers is not so high to cover new European topics. Students of youth research in sociology, psychology and political sciences

¹² National Report on Youth Policy in Slovakia for Council of Europe, Bratislava, „IUVENTA 2005,

¹³ Youth Policy in Slovakia, Rapporteur A. Azzopardi, EYC, Strasbourg 2005, 78 p. from <http://www.syrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/06/FulltextforCasestudy1.doc>, 20th October 2008

¹⁴ Analysis of Member States' and acceding countries' replies to the Commission questionnaire on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, European Commission, Brussels, 14th May 2004

absent. Talented masters and PhD. graduates with good foreign language knowledge leave for work to foreign companies or to European administration in Brussels or Strasbourg.

The youth issue has multidimensional character. Number of ministries, various departments and sections deal with this topic. Ministry of Education has been traditionally delegated to coordinate governmental policy. There are attempts to solve this multidimensionalism in more complex way in regular intervals – but without greater success. The first attempt after 1989 was the establishment of Government council for children and youth, which was approved in 1999. The statute of the council notes that it has 7 state resorts representatives and even 10 nongovernmental sector representatives (Youth Council of Slovakia, Union of towns and villages, trade unions, UNICEF and so on) – there has not been any youth research representatives. This council has never worked enough to guarantee communication among members and coordination/synergy of decisions and activities.

Council for children and youth at Ministry of Education has been working since 2007 and works on some strategic documents but also can propose to Minister of Education various measures and strategic steps. From 19 members, two members are actively working in research (RNDr. Ivan Kimák, head of Association of employees of Leisure Time Activities Centres Košice; Mgr. Dušan Štrauss, University of Cyril and Method in Trnava).

After having adopted Key areas and action plans of youth policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic for 2008-2013, joint committee first met in May 2008. Its task is the effective and complex measure preparation leading to fulfilment of this strategic material. Members of this group are representatives of government sector and municipalities as well as members of civil associations and various institutes, which work with youth. Document does not explicitly mention researchers' participation, but they participate regularly at meetings and their opinion and recommendations will be heard and included into decisions.

From 2007, under the influence of EuNYK meeting , youth researchers' network has been created in Slovakia to include decisive academic-research departments and research institutes and to integrate researchers, which work in various institutions of civic society, youth associations, alliances and trusts.

Two activities in the frame of E-data archive of youth research project took place before 2007: international symposium on data archive of youth research (April 4th 2006) and Youth

research in Slovakia (October 5th 2006), which allowed first information exchange on researches and creation of working contacts.¹⁵

On May 23rd 2007 workshop Youth research development in Slovakia and youth policy of European union took place, where members – pedagogues and research workers at universities as qualificatory works advisers and consultants, master and graduate level students (sociology, psychology, politology, social pedagogy and social work), research institutes representatives, Slovak academy of sciences, research agencies, individual researchers – get complex information on legislation, documents and various foreign networks of youth research (Finland, Belgium – Flemish community). There was a possibility for mutual informing on current situation in the scope of youth research, the system of researchers support was introduced by the Ministry of Education (IUVENTA) for 2007 – 2008. (see part 3.4.)¹⁶

On February 7th 2008 another working meeting took place in IUVENTA regarding Key areas and action plans in the field of government policy towards children and youth in 2008 in Slovakia and in European union. The participants of working meeting were expert representatives in the field of research and practise – key players that influence (can influence in future) the development of governmental policy towards youth in Slovakia. The aim of the meeting was introducing important tasks in 2008 and planned tasks for 2009-2010, help at identifying steps, involved subjects, system consultation and access to information in priority scopes (participation, information, volunteering) and in other scopes (autonomy, entrepreneurship, education and upbringing, health).¹⁷

Nowadays there is natural competition not only among academic institutes of one university but also among similar institutes at all universities (and Slovak Academy of Sciences). Particular form of overcoming this state is so-called centres of excellence for particular fields of research activities, which concentrate available research potential.

There are international associations of academic workers at worldwide and European level in Europe. For example Slovak experts cooperate with ESA – European sociological

¹⁵ E – data archive of youth researches was supported by Ministry of Education, Publication: Youth research in Slovakia, IUVENTA, Bratislava 2006.

¹⁶ Miháliková, J.: Rozvoj výskumu mládeže na Slovensku a mládežnícka politika v Európskej únii. Mládež a spoločnosť č. 3/2007, s. 86-88

¹⁷ Youth research in Slovakia, edited by L. Macháček IUVENTA, Bratislava 2006, p. 120

association, one of its section is named Research network 30 - Youth & Generations - research network for youth research www.youthgeneration.org, but also ISA – International sociological association, where section RC 35 – Research Committee Sociology of Youth works actively (that is section for youth sociology). <http://www.isa-sociology.org/rc34.htm>.

European Union supports great research projects, for example UP2YOUTH – Youth as the factor of social change. Slovakia takes part in the issue of civil participation for three year period together with 30 experts from more than 15 member countries.

Slovakia is relatively small country and that's why meeting of politicians, researchers and youth representatives is not very complicated to organise. However, we were not successful in providing regularly meetings and cooperation of these three groups. Sound tradition can be seen in regular meetings and communication between politicians and youth representatives (usually represented by Youth councils, youth and student parliaments, etc.). Meetings of researchers and politicians can be found less often. The overall joint cooperation between three actors together is least successful. There were two seminars which took place in 2007 and 2008 which attended all three groups (Ministry of Education and IUVENTA).¹⁸

On September 27th 2007 workshop regarding the issue „What do we know about children and youth? or Youth policy in Slovakia in the mirror of academic research“ took place. The participants were the representatives of regional and local municipalities (whose agenda is focused on youth), researchers and youth representatives. Groups were discussing problems and expectations and compared them in both groups. It was confirmed that researchers are more focused on subjects and phenomena which are less present in the society and politicians expect prognosis and numbers (not focused on context). Generally they agreed on research topics: young family, youth criminality, programme effectiveness analysis, youth needs and interests, local subcultures and other. The need for information accessible through booklets and web pages has been expressed, but also their user-friendliness and instant application for municipality or government were discussed.

Representants of all three groups met on May 15th 2008 at workshop „Politicians – reseachers – youth and regional youth policy“. The goal was to exchange information about

¹⁸ Jenisová (2007): *Report form seminar Youth Policy in Slovakia mirrored by scientific research*. In: Magazine Youth and Society, Nr. 4, p. 71.

creation of youth policy in 8 Slovak counties (actual conceptions, youth work subjects, projects, initiatives in the Slovak Republic and in the EU), regional policy experts consultation and actual youth issues research. The great part of discussion was devoted to the activities of school students' parliaments, which had become important factor of youth participation.

After Slovakia entered the EU in 2004, we could note the situations, when researchers do not work for „future youth work“, but unexpectedly they have to react to national legislation impetus influencing youth work or European campaigns organised and financed by European Commission. In both cases researchers have become part of network subjects, which have carried out youth policy action plan tasks and gained possibilities to implement their knowledge in practice of youth movement or youth campaigns development.

1. Support of school students councils

Establishment of school students councils is linked to Act No. 596/2003 on school self-government. The Ministry of Education in accordance with action plan of Slovak government for 2004 entrusted Institute for information and prognosis in Bratislava to organise situation survey at secondary schools and entrusted IUVENTA to organise methodical-educational sessions with goal to explain the mission of young people participation at school municipalities and contributed to non-formal education development in the area of democratic citizenship. During this task, expert group consisting of researchers, politicians and practitioners was created.

Various supporting measures took place:

- meeting of civic teachers with coordinators of school students councils at secondary schools
- e-mail survey on students' and teachers' opinion towards school students councils at vocational schools
- 8 focus groups for students in the capitals of 8 Slovak counties
- 1st Slovak conference for studying youth on topic: Autonomy and democratic citizenship education at secondary schools
- Publication from Students participation at school autonomy survey, IUVENTA 2005
- Volume from Youth participation at school autonomy conference, IUVENTA, 2006

- Non-formal education of secondary school students in various regions of Slovakia in 2006 and 2007
- Sociological survey of university and secondary school students in Slovakia in 2007 (Slovak society for youth research)
- 2nd Slovak conference for studying youth on topic: Autonomy and democratic citizenship education at secondary schools, 2007, Bratislava
- Publication of Dr. Macháček survey, We learn democracy, IUVENTA 2008

The number of pupil school councils increased from 35% in 2005 to 50% at secondary schools in 2007. Similarly, the importance of connection between school councils and their representatives and youth parliament at municipality level showed as very important one.¹⁹

2. The Council of Europe campaign „All different – all equal“ took place in 2006 and 2007 at national level in several European states.

The campaign contained specific demand for understanding opinions and attitudes to given topic before its beginning and after its conclusion. Surveys before the campaign were directly focused on youth in order identify the rate of understanding of human rights and how much are they open to ideas of tolerance. The conception of new research was consulted with representatives of Institute of information and prognosis in Bratislava (M. Bieliková a M. Sloviková), CERYS FF UCM (L. Macháček), ASA research agency (V. Palásek) and IUVENTA (J. Jambrichová). Implementation of this survey into the campaign expresses the new quality of youth policy pursuing through youth work which respect better understanding of current young generation through research scientific tools. The aim of this survey was not only to bring some information on young people opinion at the campaign beginning, but also at the en of campaign.¹⁷

Conclusions and recommendations helped the committee members to select projects for financial support and at the same time the recommendations help all participants to better understand mission and evaluation of campaign effectiveness considering Slovak situation.

¹⁹ Kimák, I. : Youth and Student parliaments on local level, magazine Youth and Society 2,2008, p.86

²⁵ Experts report on the research on opinions of young people for the campaign All Different – All Equal.

Publication was available in electronic and paper versions and its short characteristics (in English language) at www.vyskmumladeze.sk portal together with methodology.

5. Information resources for better understanding and knowledge of youth in Slovakia

Report on the state of executing the government policy towards children and youth in the years 1990 – 2000

The first attempt to evaluate the state of government policy as well as to outline the status and position of children's and young people's lives took place in 2001 at the occasion of preparation of State policy conception towards children and youth until 2007 (further conception), which creation had been preceded by national conferences on youth and relatively wide (at that time) discussion of government and third sector. The material summarised all available materials and information resources, outlined the most basic problems, which solution was thereafter proposed in conception and was further elaborated in Action plans for particular years.²⁰

The report on government policy towards youth for the Council of Europe

National report on youth policy in the Slovak Republic for the Council of Europe is the result of wide discussion of experts in governmental institutions, civil associations, and practitioners. National report was prepared during 2004 and 2005 by experts from research institutes and universities, while data was provided by various resort institutes and ministries. At that time it was clear, that the report cannot cover all important areas because there was not relevant research information available. Consultation with young people was provided by several ways: Youth Council of Slovakia representatives took part at working sessions and committees as observer and at the end they worked out official report of civil associations to national report and at all

²⁰ Youth Policy Conception in Slovakia till 2007, Bratislava, 2001, p. 57 – 150.

meetings (focus interviews, meeting with the Council of Europe expert team) young people were represented.

If we evaluate the cooperation between researchers and governmental experts during the creation of national report, we have to note several important aspects:

1. Particular areas were processed within different resorts (ministries). Evaluating viewpoints of responsible government institutions were taken into account.
2. Analysis of some of the young people's problems was not assessed deeply. Especially those which are rooted in lack of coordination between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour, social affairs and family (for example transition of young people from school to employment, preparation for partner life and responsible parenthood, sexual education, Roma minority).
3. In some cases analysis and evaluation positions absented from certain state institutions and only available researches were a base for a certain specific area of youth life.
4. On the other side not all critical research outcomes and recommendations were respected, whereas they went too far comparing the real processes of country transformation creating basic conditions of all people (for example decentralisation), financial possibilities and organisation assumptions in the area of legislation (volunteering, non-formal education and so on).
5. Nevertheless, there was also an attempt to "justify" Slovakia in front of "foreigners", in this case expert group from Council of Europe. Some of outcomes were additionally commented and some critical notes were not accepted by Slovak authorities although after some time they have been found to be objective and truth.

Special attention must be paid to the project "Electronic data archive of youth research in Slovakia" implemented jointly by Ministry of Education and IUVENTA – Slovak youth institute in 2006 (www.vyskummladeze.sk). The main goals are:

- to archive empirical data in electronic and print form and empirical survey documentation of youth carried out after 1993 in Slovakia and thus prevent the data from destruction and loss;

- to open up data for secondary analysis needs, for the needs of university education, especially at graduate studies of politology, sociology, psychology and social pedagogy, for the needs of decision makers from various youth work subjects;
- to publish up-to-date survey data in user– friendly and understandable form and thus support information level of expert and general public on specificities of the latest youth generations in Slovak society

There are 23 representative researches and 6 surveys.

Researches in data archive:

1994: Youth in the SR, its value orientation and ways of leisure time spending

1997: Attitude orientation of young people in the process of society transformation

2002: Youth and European identity

Youth participation in towns and villages

2003: OECD PISA 2003 ((Programme for International Student Assessment)

2004: Youth political participation in Europe

Opinions of primary and secondary schools' pupils on life conditions

Education for partner life and adulthood at primary and secondary schools

2005: Interest of secondary school students to serve in Armed forces of the SR

Self-government at secondary schools and universities

Social – political youth issues in the SR

Social – pathological youth issue in the SR

2006: Survey for campaign „All different – all equal“

Artistic and cultural education and forming of value orientation

OECD PISA 2006 (Programme for International Student Assessment)

2007: Level of medial literacy of young people in Slovakia

Political and civic participation of university students in Slovakia

Youth policy of regions and towns in Slovakia

Social – pathological youth issue in the SR

What do young people think? Their free time and active participation on society

European citizenship: university students' opinions and attitudes

2008: Support of young work in Slovakia

Surveys in data archive:

- Current youth subcultures
- Youth and army
- Youngsters with delinquent form of behaviour and tertiary prevention of social curatelum
- Position of internal graduate students in Slovakia
- Possibilities of spending youth leisure time in Slovakia
- Non-formal education of children and youth

At occasion of data archive opening two symposiums took place in 2006 and booklet Youth research in Slovakia, which included identification lists of first researches saved in data archive but also lot of further actual information and documents (information on data archives abroad, expert information on youth research, Resolution for common goals on better understanding and knowledge of youth of the European Council, etc).²⁰

The need to enlarge the data archive with the regional surveys and researches was based on systematisation and process data from various surveys that were carried out by young people as the part of their university qualification (Mgr., PhDr.) or as the part of their activity in the youth work in Slovakia after 1993.

Although there is no specialised research institute for youth issues in Slovakia - Institute of information and prognosis (UIPS) is approaching this profile. Although UIPS researches do not cover the whole youth life scale in Slovakia they follow different youth topics for a long time:²¹

- *Legal and illegal drug consummation research (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007)*

²¹ NOTE: Researches of UIPS mentioned from 2000. Many of them started in 90p.

Social – pathologic youth issue (2002,2005)

- *Social – political youth issue* (2002,2005)
- *Life style and youth value orientation* (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007)
- *Human rights* (2001, 2003)
- *Problem behaviour of pupils at primary and secondary schools*
- *Hobby activities and leisure time* (2002, 2003)
- *Youth participation* (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007)

It is possible to find some of researches in research data archive at www.vyskumladeze.sk. Generally it is not possible to access research materials. It is fact, that most of research institutes, as well as UIPS or Department of population statistics consistently protect their know-how, because they have an experience of unauthorized used of data. Discussions in 2008 showed that there is a need that UIPS would work on comparatory studies using its rich information sources but also working on specific topics related to theoretical background of youth work in Slovakia.

The establishment of academic society merging researchers from various sciences is another contribution to improving situation in youth research. Slovak Youth Research Society www.syrs.org wants to support academic youth research and to disseminate academic information on youth in public in order to include new generations of youth into new European community. The society prepares various analysis and documents for non-formal education of youth leaders and youth workers, which are presented at webpage of society.

One of the initiatives, which aim is to search and merge individuals in the area of youth was started by IUVENTA – Slovak youth institute. IUVENTA has first financially supported independent youth researches in 2007 with the topic of civil and political participation in autonomous and representative democracy, volunteering in youth work, media competences of pupils and students, creation of conception of youth policy in towns and villages. Based on the project call the space was opened for cooperation with individual researchers, independent groups or professional companies (see also Data archive, researches in 2007). Relevance of outcomes and use of the proper methodology is secured by system of external consultations and opponents, where space is created for discussion and expert advice or polemics.

National reports on common objectives²² were also a solid information sources in the frame of open method of coordination. As Slovakia lacks regular monitoring in the field of youth, all information were gathered by cumulating partial information from various researches, surveys and information sources and qualitative surveys (focus groups, individual interviews, consultation of the reports themselves at regional and national level). Reports on participation and information of young people were prepared and presented in 2005 and 2006.

Journals related to youth researches

There are two journals in Slovakia:

„Youth and society.“ Slovak journal for state youth policy and youth research is published regularly 4 times a year since 1990. Ministry of Education and Institute for information and prognosis are its publishers.

„ZOOM – focused on youth“, is published by Youth Council of Slovakia with financial support of Ministry of Education. Magazine is aimed at professional youth workers or volunteers, youth activities, but also at municipality workers whose agenda involves youth and also other youth public. Outcomes of youth research are published regularly in this magazine.

6. Youth research and methodology

Youth research in Slovakia is characterised by high disciplinary differentiation. Sociological and psychological researches prevail from the methodological point of view nevertheless pedagogical research of school youngsters prevail in quantitative point of view. It brings various analysis of actual education problems of children and youth connected with classical socialisation institutes

²² National report on participation, IUVENTA 2006; National report on youth information, IUVENTA 2006; National report on common objectives implementation on voluntary activities of young people in Slovakia, Ministry of Education in Slovak Republic 2006.

as family, school, youth association but also the new ones as for example mass media and internet.

Mr. Peter Gavora (Pedagogical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava) analysed methodological aspects of empiric researches that were published in the magazine "Pedagogical revue" in the years 1993 – 2003.²³ He analysed 151 texts from the point of view of research type and different parts of research (hypothesis, research methods, research pack, differentiation, generalisation of outcomes as well as ethical issues of realised researches. Mr. Ladislav Macháček (Philosophical Faculty of University of Cyril and Method in Trnava) realised another analysis in a similar way working with 25 research texts placed in electronic data archive (www.vyskummladeze.sk). This methodological analysis of pedagogical and sociological youth researches executed in Slovakia after 1993 marked certain generally valid tendencies.

Exploration research prevails in pedagogical field as well as quantitative research prevail over qualitative. Description of research outcomes dominates and simple statistical methods are mostly used. There is a lack of hypothesis which can be justified by empiric data. Questionnaires are mostly used (distributed to respondents to be filled out), representativeness of research cluster is problematic and principles of generalisation of outcomes are not strictly followed.

Classical sociological requirements are used in sociological research in order to realise empiric researches (face to face interviews, representativeness of research clusters, measurement and stating the reliability and validity, differentiation of data through specific software such as SPSS). In relation to international research projects, quantitative researches are combined with qualitative surveys (focus groups and deep individual interview).

Collected knowledge can grab the attention of pedagogical as well as politological, journalistic and media departments of universities and educational institutes with the aim of better qualitative preparation of students in methodology of empiric researches. Motivation of youth policy institutions for creating of new training modules in non-formal learning of youth workers is also important moment in spreading the information about the research (its organisation, research projects preparation, understanding the presentations and their application in practise).

Insufficient acknowledgment of outcomes, development and application of methodology of qualitative (regional) researches is still present. Qualitative research as independent and main research method enables the penetration to specific youth subcultures which are presented to outer world as small groups of young people with the ability of “extraordinary action” at public. This can be in the field of art (graffiti, techno scene, fan clubs, religion sects, internet surfers), politics (skinheads, anarchists, ecologists,) youth movements or also sport fan clubs. It is clear that youth policy has limited ability to react at certain specific place (region, cities) to new youth scenes (for example shopping centres and their leisure time offers), in which everyday life of youngsters happens.

Another problem is based in the fact that majority of analysed sociological empiric researches focused more on practical elements of youth work (for example participation, information, addiction). Only exceptionally there were hypothesis tested which would enable connection of these elements with more general characteristic of youth in order to better understand specificities of present young generation comparing with previous ones.

At the same time the theory of individualisation of youth is well elaborated in area of youth sociology. Taking into consideration reflections of European youth policy there are theoretical thesis that under condition of European Union, so called autonomy of young people should be increased, which is also connected with support, sources and possibilities of choice to independent life, to independently manage their needs, fully participate socially and politically in all areas of life and have the ability to be independent in their decisions.

Public discussion of experts (September 17th 2008, IUVETA) noted that there are preconditions for formulating theoretical hypothesis about trends of autonomy for specific segments and sequences of life and lifestyle of young people and at the same time for formulating outcomes for the process of individualisation of young people in the frame of youth policy where the support is needed for overcoming the doubts of independent inclusion into social life as adults.²⁴

²⁴ Methodological characterization of empirical youth research in Slovakia, prof. Macháček, presented during public discussion about the national report on common objectives on better understanding and knowledge in Slovakia, 17th September 2008

Although there can be found some professional researches done by youth associations, for example YMCA²⁵ (survey Volunteering as competition advantage of candidates in target group of human resources managers and knowledge about volunteer organisations, 2004) and Youth Council of Slovakia²⁶ (research – What do young people think – their free time and active participation on community life), in general we can note that surveys of youth associations or other similar subjects use not professional questionnaires, which can be only very problematically evaluated. No proper preparation is done stated empirically verifiable hypothesis. There is no use of specialised statistical software for analysing the data, as for example SPSS. Representativeness of surveys is also problematic also when working with adequate number of responses. When collecting data, no anonymity is secured, questionnaire networks are set up from school teachers or members of youth association.²⁷

Conclusion

Youth policy in Slovakia has undergone through big changes during past 20 years. It would be biased to say that membership in the EU would not have an impact on this situation. Contrariwise reporting obligations created the conditions and platform for discussions, networking and looking for common solutions especially relating to the main topics as volunteering, participation and information.

The area of better understanding and knowledge of youth was from the beginning in the shadow comparing to other main topics. But in the last 2-3 years this topic reached higher quality and importance also because of the influence of activities under Partnership for youth and motivation activities of EuNYK.

More intense cooperation has started (meetings, networking, and consultations) between researchers from various scientific fields with interest in youth work. There is still lack of cooperation with some of the departments, institutions and universities from more distant areas

²⁵ http://www.partnerstva.sk/buxus/docs/YMCA_Prieskum_dobrovolnictvo.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.vyskummladeze.sk/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=98&lang=sk>

²⁷ Questionnaire EKCYF „Better Understanding and Knowledge of Youth in Slovakia”, Ministry of Education, Juventa, 2008.

of Slovakia (Prešov, Košice, Ružomberok. etc.), where there is a still uncovered potential and assets.

Financial opportunities from Ministry of Education in cooperation with IUVENTA to fund the missing researches (although not in great extent) can be also positively evaluated. New publications are created that summarise research outcomes and which are distributed to key players (municipalities at regional and local level, civic associations and their umbrella organisations).

Multidisciplinary cooperation between different sectors is still seen as problematic in the light of European Youth Pact, where intense cooperation and synergies between ministries and their measures is expected. Ministry of Education can play bigger role in this area in the future through its department for children and youth by initiating and coordinating of meetings related to specific topics and communication between research, politics and practise.

As National report shows²⁸, youth research faces several obstacles as for example implementation of researches only one area (resort) without connections to others, competition between institutions, absence of tradition in cooperation, research not based on target groups but most importantly low promotion of research outcomes. Preparation and implementation of various measures will be needed to change this situation.

- To prepare (with participation of all key players) a document “Strategy of development of youth research in Slovakia” and to put into the practise the measures stated there;²⁹
- To create the system of regular monitoring of youth life taking into consideration regular reports on youth presented at Slovak Parliament (2010) as three-years reports on youth in the frame of European Union;
- Building up the systematic cooperation between state, public and private institutions, which deal with youth research (from exchange of information up to coordination and synergy of activities and common measures in the future);

²⁸ National report on implementation of the common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of the youth field in the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, October 2008 Bratislava Report text: Mgr. Jana Miháliková, IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute.

- To clear up and promote the approach of master and graduate students' diploma works at particular universities with the aim to exchange and network of experts, consultants, etc. Building up the network of contact persons at universities and other institutions.
- State and public institutions from the area of youth research should provide themselves not only with results of their researches (on the web page or on a request) but also with background materials (questionnaires, SPSS files, research reports, etc.);
- Preparation of further educational and support programmes and measures for young researchers in the area of youth research (workshops on methods, training, consultancy, involvement into projects, etc.);
- Increasing quality of surveys and researches of youth and civic associations by providing them with support measures (publications on methodology, seminars and workshops, consultancy and guidance, etc.);
- Direct support of researches by grant programmes of the Ministry of Education at national and regional level; promotion of other financial sources from European Union.
- Involvement of researchers into important working groups that influence the development of youth policy in Slovakia (multidisciplinary committee, Council for children and youth as counselling body of the Minister, members of the selection committees of the grant programmes, etc.);
- To strengthen the role of youth research and presence of researchers in the process of creation of regional youth policies (transfer of knowledge from national to regional level);
- Transfer of research results to university curriculum of pedagogy, psychology, social work, sociology and politology.
- Dissemination of information about data archive of youth research, enlargement of the archive while keeping the professionalism and certain level;
- Publication of results from some interest researches in popular form; distribution of the publications to employees of regional and local municipalities and other key players;
- Using the information collected at EKCYP predominantly for interested experts as EKCYP offers possibilities for creating the comparatory studies.

- Putting stress to more effective ways of cooperation and task divisions between EKCYP and EuNYK – finding compromise for management of administrative conditions in line with the given rules;
- Widening of EuNYK network for representatives of national politicians and youth;
- Motivation of young researchers in Slovakia to active participation on Partnership on Youth activities as well on organisation of these activities.

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