



Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme

YEPP's Concept of Change

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, USA • Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy • European Foundation Centre
Evens Foundation, Belgium • Fondation Bernheim, Belgium • Ford Foundation, USA
Freudenberg Stiftung, Germany • International Academy at the Free University of Berlin, Germany
Irish Youth Foundation, Ireland • Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation

“Building strong communities through collaboration, provides a basis for positive change. As we have found, the most effective solutions often are those devised locally, where people have the greatest stake in the outcome. For that reason, strong, self-reliant individuals are essential to a well functioning society. Moreover, individuals have a critical role to play in shaping their surroundings.”

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation: Philosophy, Programs and Procedures

“Over the years, we have seen that through opportunities to participate in a community’s affairs, young people gain self esteem, confidence, and essential life skills such as decision making, conflict management, teamwork, and the ability to work in diverse environments.”

International Youth Foundation: What works in Youth Participation?

“We’re trying to make the situation better for young people in Kristinestad that can be the local buses, schools etc. We arrange happenings like the ‘Cultural café’, where local bands can perform. We wanna young peoples’ voices to be heard; therefore we talk to politicians and state our opinions.”

Anna-Kajsa Blomkvist (18), Chairperson of the Youth Council Kristinestad, YEPP Finland

Youth Context and Need

Young people, particularly those living in areas of Europe which are severely disadvantaged, are experiencing complex challenges and social alienation. Despite a relatively strong tradition of social welfare policies in most European countries, poverty has become an issue in many young people's lives, threatening their full participation in society and leading to a feeling of not having access to fair and just opportunities. However, it is widely agreed that social exclusion can not be attributed to economic issues alone, there are also political and societal dimensions, including *"problems of participation; the meaninglessness of everyday politics as experienced by many people; unstable community affiliations combined with a lack of real emotional recognition."* (Prof. Dr. Heitmeyer, University of Bielefeld, Germany)

Many young people are dissatisfied with the way public decisions are made and have a growing feeling that they are not listened to, and are not taken seriously. There is a growing sense of frustration among youth, which is compounded when experiences of discrimination - because of ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and/or sexual orientation - are added. The October 2005 riots in Paris and other French cities were just the most striking evidence of these developments.

The number of European young people attracted by anti-democratic groups and ideologies (including authoritarian, racist, or radical religious groups and movements) is growing. While the factors leading to such attitudes and actual participation are complex and diverse, evidence suggests that promises of recognition, of togetherness and of defined roles and tasks contribute to their attractiveness. This, in turn, gives further hints to the problem of missed opportunities which many young people are increasingly experiencing in mainstream democratic societies.

The alienation experienced by young people today presents challenges that are as complex as they are urgent. The interests of children and youth at risk in Europe, as in the rest of the world, need to be given higher priority in public, private and independent decision-making, and most importantly, young people themselves must be involved as agents of change rather than as mere recipients of assistance.

The Programme Background and Aims

The establishment of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) was the result of discussions which had been held in the Education and Youth Interest Group of the European Foundation Centre from 1998 onwards. Between November 2000 and May 2001, a formal preparatory phase took place, which was hosted by the European Cultural Foundation. In this phase, the YEPP concept was further developed and concretised by a team of consultants, consisting of Angelika Krüger (Institute for Community Education, International Academy at the Free University Berlin), Prof. Dr. Robert Picht (College of Europe), Prof. Dr. Peter Evans (OECD / CERl), and Florence Gérard, (ISC sprl, Brussels).

In September 2001, YEPP started as a collaborative initiative of a group of European and US foundations, the International Academy (INA) at the Free University of Berlin and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), under the auspices of the Network of European Foundations (NEF). It was the first partnership programme of European foundations in the area of education and youth and the partners in YEPP set out to establish an innovative, high-quality programme to address complex social challenges and improve the lives of young people at risk in an integrated and systematic way.

YEPP aims to improve the lives of young people at risk and the communities in which they live, by:

- 1) nurturing a culture of active citizenship which empowers young people and adults to contribute toward improving their own local circumstances; and to participate in and to contribute to society at the European and global levels.
- 2) overcoming the fragmentation of public and private initiatives and services and encouraging strong cross-sectoral partnerships;
- 3) influencing public, independent and private policies and programming in order to:
 - increase young people's choices and opportunities to actively participate in civil society;
 - reduce risk factors and overcome disadvantage and discrimination by supporting equal opportunities for all young people.

In the years since YEPP came to life, its aim to improve the lives of young-people at risk and the communities in which they live, has remained constant -but the Concept of Change has continued to evolve. YEPP's Concept of Change is a living document which is subject to an ongoing process of analysis, strategic planning, action and reflection. This evolution is based on the experiences, evaluations and lessons learnt, from both within and outside of the programme, and it reflects one of YEPP's greatest strengths -its ability to continually grow, adapt and respond.

Assumptions about Change

The theoretical assumptions behind YEPP's Concept of Change have many roots. The Community Development and Community Education movements have been especially influential, particularly in their emphasis of local ownership of change and empowerment processes along with their advancing of Action Research. Many of the key concepts also come from civil rights' movements and from organizations working for equal opportunities for disadvantaged people. YEPP's Concept of Change assumes:

- 1) Because young people experience the positive and negative influences of society most directly in the local communities in which they live, **interventions to support young people must start at the community level and involve the larger community in the change process.**
- 2) Sustainable change requires an authentic understanding of the various relationships within communities and the specific causes of disempowerment and exclusion. To be effective, local stakeholders must be involved in the processes of analysing and defining the issues which need to be changed. **Change needs authentic knowledge – and people and organizations that are prepared to use that knowledge when planning actions.**
- 3) Young people at risk face a number of interconnected problems and challenges, making fragmented approaches inadequate. Short-term interventions responding to a perceived crisis or a specific problem (e.g. unemployment) fail to achieve long-term solutions. **Sustainable change requires holistic approaches, long-term planning and coordinated cross-sectoral efforts.**
- 4) Communities are improved by people and organizations with knowledge, skills and capabilities. **To support the development of civil society, people and organizations should be given access to capacity building opportunities.**
- 5) Issues of social alienation and exclusion are global phenomena and because the world is increasingly a globalised community, what happens at an international level has a direct impact on the local level and vice versa. **Local change processes can be strengthened and improved through international exchange and cooperation.**
- 6) Long-term solutions cannot be achieved by community members alone; sustainable change is inextricably linked to systemic change. **Public, private and independent policy must reflect holistic approaches and target policy changes which support the empowerment, inclusion and participation of young people.**

The Guiding Principles of YEPP's Concept of Change

The following guiding principles provide the essence of YEPP's philosophy and approach. They express the common ground underpinning the diverse activities and projects which are developed on local, national, European, and international levels in order to respond to the diverse needs of young people in disadvantaged communities.

1) Starting from the needs of the local community and mobilising local resources:

Locally owned and developed innovations must meet local needs and actively involve local resources.

2) Establishing cross-sectoral partnerships:

Long-term and systemic change in communities can only be brought about through joining forces and coordinating the efforts of individuals, organisations and other stakeholders in the community.

3) Involving local stakeholders in strategic planning, implementation and evaluation:

The local stakeholders are encouraged and trained to actively participate in all parts of the local programme development.

4) Creating opportunities for young people's active participation in decision-making:

Supporting young people's empowerment requires that young people are viewed as competent individuals. When youth are listened to and trusted, they expand their capabilities and are able to become more active and responsible citizens.

5) Integrating action and evaluation:

The local development process is supported by systematic evaluation and regular feedback.

6) Bridging gaps between schools, youth, the community, and informal education:

Schools are needed as active contributors to positive community development and youth empowerment. This requires that schools open their doors to the community and cooperate constructively with it.

7) Investing in capacity building:

Long term changes require capable people to pursue agreed goals. Through capacity-building in formal and non-formal settings, both young people's and adults' ability to create change in their communities are strengthened.

8) Providing equal opportunities:

Equal opportunities and respect for young people of both genders and from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds are fundamental principles of YEPP.

(9) Integrating the local, national, European and international dimensions:

The local development processes are supported systematically by an international working and learning network, which allows YEPP community members to jointly develop new initiatives both within and across national borders.

10) Advocating for new policies:

Policies targeted at youth at risk and the communities in which they live are often fragmented and deficit-oriented. The partners in YEPP advocate more holistic approaches which follow principles of empowerment, participation and partnership.

YEPP's Concept of Change: A Multileveled Approach

YEPP's concept is multileveled at its core. The first level are the local programme sites, the second are the national/regional clusters and the third is the European-wide, international YEPP Community Network. No one level is given priority over the other and all levels work together as a whole. This multileveled approach encourages diverse groups sharing a common vision to join together in innovative ways and provides a rich resource for professional, personal and intercultural learning as well as capacity building.

YEPP Programme Sites

YEPP Programme Sites are the local areas for YEPP's actions. They are defined rural and urban geographical areas where there is both a concentration of severe problems affecting children and youth and a variety of already-existing initiatives and services working toward youth and community empowerment. Despite all the efforts to create positive change within these communities, there remains a need for increased levels of partnership and cooperation and a more comprehensive joint strategy.

YEPP's guiding principles are put into practice in the programme sites through a shared set of innovations which are further explained in the section titled "The DNA of a YEPP Programme Site".

National/Regional Clusters

National/regional clusters are made up of YEPP Programme Sites and YEPP Affiliate Sites. YEPP Affiliate Sites follow an approach which is compatible with YEPP and are active members of the YEPP Community Network. Clustering sites and building strategic alliances are important because the living conditions and opportunities for local action cannot be separated from the broader policy framework -which is partly defined by national governments.

YEPP's work on the national and regional level aims to ensure that the guiding principles of YEPP are considered and reflected in national policy-making. Clusters work together to identify key policy messages which they want to convey and to increase their leveraging power when it comes to negotiating with national and regional decision-makers and influencing policy change.

The YEPP Community Network

The YEPP Community Network includes all of the actors within YEPP - the local stakeholders, the young people, the donors, and the practitioners along with all those involved with YEPP Affiliate Sites. The YEPP Community Network is European-wide and international and is a central component in YEPP's work because in a globalised world active citizenship can no longer be restricted to the local or national level.

Through continuous communications, capacity-building workshops, youth meetings, study visits and conferences, the YEPP Community members get to know each other and the local contexts in which the other YEPP Community members are living and working. YEPP Community members discuss experiences and challenges as well as celebrate, showcase and ultimately disseminate best practices and successes.

Through the network, community members simultaneously gain a deeper understanding of their own local issues and begin to see how problems are inter-

connected both across Europe and internationally. In this way, members receive both inspiration and support for their local work and the chance to collaborate in joint European and international activities and projects.

The international nature of the YEPP Community Network strengthens YEPP's voice when calling for policy changes and increases the likelihood of gaining access to key decision-makers at the European and international levels -putting the goal of encouraging more coordinated and participatory approaches for providing young people with more empowering and supportive conditions to grow up in, within reach.

The DNA of a YEPP Programme Site: Characteristic Innovations at the Local Level

YEPP's guiding principles are put into practice in the YEPP Programme Sites through a shared set of innovations which are flexible enough to allow each local site to adapt the methods and tools according to local needs and contexts.

The Local Support Group

The Local Support Groups are the motors of the local change processes. These voluntary, community-based groups are the basic units for the creation of cross-sectoral partnerships at the local level. Their membership includes local stakeholders from different sectors and organisations, among them young people, who have an expressed interest in the development of their community. The work of the Local Support Group is facilitated by a professional Local Coordinator and a Local Researcher.

The Operational Plan

Each Local Support Group develops an Operational Plan based on an assessment of local needs and a mapping of existing assets and resources. The plan describes the local strategy for youth and community empowerment and it lays out agreed goals, strategies, actions and indicators.

The Cycle of Change

The YEPP Cycle of Change is driven by an ongoing process of analysis, strategic planning, action and reflection. At regular intervals, with the support of professional local researchers, the Local Support Group assesses to what extent goals have been achieved. As a result of this assessment, the existing problems are worked on and the plan is revised, taking into account the lessons learnt so far. These lessons are also shared with the other programme sites within the YEPP Community Network. This dynamic process supports qualitative leaps forward based on the knowledge and experience of the local actors.

Local Donor Partners

The Local Donor Partners play a key role in local development by helping build the local YEPP infrastructures, providing funding, giving support and contributing expertise as needed. Their goal is to assist local communities in creating self-sustaining, integrated programming that improves the lives of young people at risk along with the communities in which they live. Local Donor Partners contribute to the general programme budget and can be members of the YEPP Steering Committee and therefore involved in all aspects of strategic decision-making for the programme.

Membership in the YEPP Community Network

Each YEPP Programme Site is an active member of the European-wide, international YEPP Community Network - which includes the national/regional clusters - and they cooperate closely with the YEPP support structures.

YEPP Support Structures

As a multileveled programme which is continually growing, YEPP requires a strong support structure to ensure YEPP can achieve its goals. These key structures include the YEPP Programme Team and the International Resource Centre –both hosted by the International Academy / INA gGmbH at the Free University of Berlin, as well as all partners represented on the YEPP Steering Committee.

The YEPP Programme Team

The Programme Team links the local, national, European and international levels and supports all YEPP programming. At the local level, the Programme Team is in close contact with every existing programme site and plays a key role in establishing new ones. Members of the team make regular site visits to support and monitor the progress of local developments and contribute expertise and resources as necessary.

The Programme Team supports the establishment and coordination of national/regional clusters, helps them build strategic partnerships, works closely with them to identify policy agendas for change and assists them in coordinating relevant actions. At the European and international level, the Programme Team maintains and manages the International Resource Centre (IRC).

International Resource Centre (IRC)

The IRC is the central agency for capacity building and knowledge management within the programme. The IRC:

- pools expertise, examples of best practice and lessons learnt from both within and outside the YEPP network;
- supports the programme by creating, managing and disseminating resources, including a practitioners' handbook;
- plans, organises and coordinates international meetings, trainings and events;
- monitors and evaluates programme development at all levels;
- researches and communicates relevant policy developments and innovations to local sites;
- works with local sites to develop and present policy recommendations to decision-makers at all levels.

YEPP Steering Committee

The YEPP Steering Committee is composed of the YEPP Partners -representatives from the foundations which have made a specified financial commitment to the YEPP programme, along with representatives from NEF and INA. The Steering Committee collaborates closely with OECD and the European Foundation Centre (EFC) and is responsible for all aspects of strategic decision-making for the overall programme.

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