

# **The history of youth work and its relevance for youth policy in Serbia today**

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## **→ Historical perspective**

An attempt to give a broader framework and historical perspective to the development of youth policy in Serbia is a very difficult task because of the complex history of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia (different states and different names). It deserves a comprehensive historical approach; however, this paper's primary aim is to give one possible perspective with an accompanying historical background on youth policy in Serbia. More precisely, certain important phases and key milestones for this topic will be highlighted and discussed in a socio-cultural and historical context.

Different types of youth care have existed in different historical periods, from early forms in the Serbian Kingdom (in the 19th century) up to the systematic institutional approach of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia (formed in 2007).

An overview of the main features that are important for the development of youth policy in Serbia will be presented. These date back to the 19th century, and indeed further, in certain cases.

## → Different organisations of children and youth care

Different forms of child and youth care existed even at the end of the 19th century, during the 20th century in the Serbian Kingdom and later, after the First World War, in the Yugoslav Kingdom. The purpose of the first organisations was of a humanitarian nature.

One of the oldest organisations of this kind is that of the Friends of Children of Serbia. Originally, it was called the Society for Help and Education of Poor and Abandoned Children. They have been active almost continuously since 1880, with small interruptions during war periods (Potkonjak 2000).<sup>42</sup> Also, one of the most important organisations which, at that time, existed both in Serbia and at the international level was the Scout Organisation of Serbia. In Serbia, this organisation was founded in 1911 (by Dr Milos D. Popovic). After the Second World War, in 1950, they resumed their activities and the organisation still exists today.<sup>43</sup>

A series of small-scale organisations were also formed during the 20th century in Serbia, for example:

- Youth Hostels Association of Yugoslavia (founded in 1920);<sup>44</sup>
- Youth Music of Serbia (founded in 1950); the original name was the Society of Friends of Serbia;
- Nature Conservation Movement of Serbia (founded in 1960);<sup>45</sup>

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42. The aim of the organisation is to promote and enable the rights of children and create conditions for their carefree and happy childhood, to respect the child's position in society, and advance the free, harmonious and optimal development of all children in the spirit of our traditions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It functions in municipal organisations. Currently, there are 39 organisations. Members are parents, teachers, professionals who work with children, and others.

43. Currently, in Serbia there are 80 Scout groups and independent companies, with about 4 000 members and 500 leaders. The Scout Organisation of Serbia is a member of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), which represents the world's largest movement of non-formal education. Some of the particular goals of these organisations were/are: the participation of youth in the process of informal education throughout their development, the application of a special method that teaches each individual to be the main carrier of their own development process, developing a love of nature and the life in it, understanding its laws, education of members and the development of qualities such as: diligence, humility, creativity, communication, tolerance, perseverance, resourcefulness, courage, sincerity, honesty, thrift and a sense of living and working in small and large groups. It develops respect for others, friendship among people and nations, and respect for their personal, religious and political beliefs, and others.

44. The Youth Hostels Association of Yugoslavia was founded in 1920 in Sarajevo. The first seaside resort was built in 1923. During the Second World War the movement stopped its activities, but renewed them in 1952. The goal of this organisation is to promote youth mobility and tourism, and their guidelines are: "Travelling broadens your mind" and "Get to know your homeland in order to love it more".

45. The Nature Conservation Movement of Serbia was founded in 1960, when afforestation activity took place under the banner of "Month of the forest". This is a strong, still existing organisation, which originated from that small-scale action. Its objectives are: planting and protecting forests and vegetation outside forests, environmental education and raising environmental awareness among citizens of all ages, encouraging active public participation in decision-making processes of importance for the environment and promotion of volunteerism.

- Young Researchers of Serbia (founded in 1969) developed from the research movement. Today, it is a national-level organisation and consists of three divisions: Youth, Volunteer Service of Serbia and the Protection and Improvement of the Environment.<sup>46</sup>

### → New state – new patterns

After the Second World War, the new state of Yugoslavia was formed, where new patterns of child and youth care were developed. We have to emphasise that, during and after the war, anti-fascist and ideological influences were predominant in these new forms of child and youth care.

The most promoted values were brotherhood, equality, solidarity (in today's vocabulary, intergenerational solidarity, social inclusion and cohesion), friendship, liberty and collectivity.<sup>47</sup>

During that period, the personality cult of President Josip Broz Tito was encouraged among young people in many different ways. For example, Youth Day was celebrated on 25 May, Tito's birthday. Celebrations for Youth Day were carefully prepared, involving a lot of children and young people in different activities all over the country.

Between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s, youth work activities were very popular, including voluntary labour by young people. The main goal of this type of action was the building of public infrastructure (roads, railways, etc.), but it also involved other structured activities (for example, sports and cultural activities) and the promotion of mobility among young people. Their motto was "We are building railways – Railways are building us".

It indicates the collective effort in building a new society, on the one hand, and, on the other, an understanding of the nature of human development.

The biggest and the most important organisation after the Second World War was the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia. Every child became a pioneer in first grade (at the age of 7). It functioned as a kind of preparation for children to become members of a collective. The instructors who worked in schools with younger pupils, and prepared them, were older pupils from the same school.

At the end of primary school, pupils become members of the Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia, an organisation identified as carrying out public duties and obligations.<sup>48</sup>

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46. Their motto is "Think big, do little – start an avalanche" and their goals are: raising awareness of the need to protect and preserve the environment, promotion and development of voluntary movements, co-operation with international organisations, and popularisation of scientific research and creativity among young people. Young Researchers of Serbia is a member of many international organisations.

47. Symbols (such as, uniforms, anthems, rules) and symbolic rituals also had strong messages of collectivity.

48. The genealogy of the Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia: Young Communist League of Yugoslavia (youth wing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia between 1919 and 1948); after the Second World War, together with the Unified League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia, the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia formed the People's Youth of Yugoslavia; and the People's Youth of Yugoslavia was later renamed the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (which disbanded in the early 1990s).

## → Period of crisis during the 1990s

After the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, certain institutions concerned with youth issues, as well as the Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia, folded. Therefore, foreign donors and NGOs took care of the needs of young people.

During the 1990s, various activities, and NGO programmes and youth projects in Serbia were supported by international organisations and aimed at certain social groups of children and youth. A significant number of programmes and projects were specifically designed for refugee and internally displaced children and youth, whilst others were organised as workshops and extra-curricular activities for all pupils at school or as an integral part of the regular curriculum.<sup>49</sup>

The activities of some NGOs and the nature of some projects were primarily of a humanitarian nature. A large number of projects focused on non-violent communication, non-violent conflict resolution, mediation, tolerance, active citizenship, etc. Some programmes were dedicated to educators working in school with pupils. A distinct kind of activity and form of participation during this period was the student movement, with large-scale student movements/protests in Serbia in the 1990s; student demonstrations in 1992; and a student rebellion in 1996-97. The student protests in Serbia in the 1990s were very specific and had distinctive cultural characteristics (they were original, offering new forms of communication, and with humorous messages), in the sense that they had a formative role in articulating patterns of massive civic protest in Serbia.

## → Youth activism in the genesis of the ministry

For a long time, there was no institutional, strategic or legal framework dealing with youth policy at national level. In addition, the evidence, research and programmes dedicated to this segment of the population were sporadic and insufficient. Of course, it does not mean that there were no activities in this field.

In November 2001, the Youth Section (in the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia) was established as the only governmental body in the Republic of Serbia responsible for youth issues, although after the elections in 2004 it was closed down. As a reaction there was intensive advocacy of youth NGOs gathered within the Youth Coalition of Serbia to establish a national body that would be in charge of dealing with youth policy.

Young people in Serbia joined the NGO initiative and blocked the work of the government with their request to get an appropriate ministry to bear the name "youth". This idea had to be accepted by the youth wings of the political parties, so that they could put pressure on their political leaders to understand the importance

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49. For example: the Programme for Supporting and Promoting Child Development within a War-Affected Social Context (known as "Smile keepers" supported by UNICEF); the Education of Refugee Children in the War-Disturbed Environment project (supported by UNESCO); Goodwill Classroom, etc. For the majority of these programmes and projects the cultural-historical theory of L. S. Vygotsky was the theoretical and methodological framework. More precisely, most of them were based on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and the concepts of interaction and social construction (Vygotsky 1978).

of the topic. And then, after premature parliamentary elections in May 2007, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia was formed.<sup>50</sup>

The birth of this particular ministry speaks volumes about youth activism, and how young people can change the institutional landscape and how significant the partnership between the governmental and non-governmental sectors is. So, the situation had been significantly changed and youth care became one of the priorities of state policy.

### → Triple process

In fact, the ministry conducted a triple-pronged approach. Firstly, a National Youth Strategy was developed. In partnership with different stakeholders, preparations were begun to create a National Youth Strategy, because Serbia was the only country in the region without such a strategy. Secondly, there were awareness-raising exercises to stress the importance of youth policy. The ministry co-operated with the media, creating campaigns with young people as active participants and promoters of human rights, the Millennium Development Goals, the environment, healthy lifestyles, peer education, non-formal education, etc. Thirdly, a network for implementing youth policy was developed and empowered. Co-operation and fruitful sustainable partnerships between NGOs and the government were formed. When the process of developing the National Youth Strategy was taking place, NGOs began to implement the goals defined by it. There is continuous support for the projects of youth associations and associations dealing with youth. This third process of development and empowerment of the implementation network also includes very important mechanisms for improving the everyday lives of young people: namely, local youth offices.

### → Creating a strategy with youth and for youth

The preconditions for the National Youth Strategy development were: a long consultative process, research on youth and co-operation between state bodies, the non-governmental sector and the young people themselves (Krnjaić and Mitrović 2009). Through research, consultation, 167 round tables, seven regional and three central conferences 16 000 young people were mobilised, together with 41 NGOs, 18 ministries and a large number of experts in order to articulate the strategy. And then, after a year, on 9 May 2008, the Government of Serbia adopted the National Youth Strategy, which detailed the relationship of the state with young people and the role of young people in society. Also, the action plan for the strategy's implementation was adopted; it helped that young people were recognised in the Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2009, through the activities of 16 ministries. The process was evaluated as successful by young people themselves, as well as by the Council of Europe's independent experts on youth policy (Denstad 2009).

In the development of the strategy more than 16 000 young people participated in different ways. This indicates the success of the initiative, because in general, the participation rates of young people, especially certain groups of young people, are low. This is a recognised issue even in countries with developed youth policies and a well-developed youth work field (Coussée 2008; Williamson 1997).

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50. Besides the Sector for Youth, the Ministry of Youth and Sport includes the Sector for Sport and the Sector for Project Management.

The vision of this strategy is that young people in Serbia in the 21st century are active and equal participants in all areas of social life and they have equal rights and possibilities for full development of their potentials. It refers to their active roles in family life, education, employment, health and overall social life. The strategy also presents the relationship of the state towards youth, which it sees as possessing creative potential.

The principle of co-management was illustrated by the fact that the strategy included the Manifesto of the Youth of Serbia (Youth Manifesto) as an integral part. In that manifesto, young people described themselves and clearly expressed their expectations. It is the “voice of young people” and according to reports (Denstad 2009), it led to renewed efforts among the youth organisations in order to co-operate and establish a common umbrella structure. The mission is to bring back young people’s faith in institutions. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to give them hope that they will be able to influence institutions with their energy and activism. It is important to emphasise that a wide consultative process and transparency in development are essential for building the confidence of young people in institutions, as well as developing feelings of ownership, or an awareness that their combined force might make a significant difference.

### → The First Serbian National Youth Strategy

The National Youth Strategy was adopted on 9 May 2008, Europe Day. The action plan for implementation of the strategy for the period 2009-14 was adopted in January 2009.

In the strategy, the ministry refers to young people between the ages of 15 and 30. There are about a million and a half young people in Serbia, which accounts for 20% of the total population.<sup>51</sup> The strategy is an intersectoral document that includes the outputs of the consultative process, and is based on relevant and available data and research initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sport (research was commissioned on the following topics: active youth participation in social life, everyday life of youth in Serbia and their activities, capacities of youth NGOs and NGOs dealing with youth for participation in the implementation of youth policy). Some 11 objectives were defined for the strategy. They incorporate all those areas that were highlighted (by the participants in the consultative process) as being especially important for the overall life of young people in Serbia.

The strategic objectives are to:

- encourage young people to participate actively in society;
- develop youth co-operation and to provide conditions for participation in decision-making processes through a sustainable institutional framework, based on the needs of young people and in co-operation with youth;
- establish a system of youth information at all levels and in all areas;
- achieve the right to equality of chances for all young people in society, and especially for those who live under difficult conditions;
- encourage and evaluate the extraordinary results and achievements of young people in different areas;
- improve the possibilities of youth to spend quality leisure time;

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51. In 2050, there will be an expected 18% of young people (1 188 637), aged between 15 and 30.

- develop an open, effective, efficient and justifiable system of formal and non-formal education available to all young people, which is in line with world educational trends and the educational context in the Republic of Serbia;
- encourage and stimulate all forms of employment, self-employment and youth entrepreneurship;
- improve the conditions for a secure life for young people;
- protect and improve health, to decrease health risks and to develop youth-friendly health promotion techniques;
- empower young people in the initiatives and activities that are in line with the basic goals of sustainable development and a healthy environment.

In implementing the 11 objectives of the National Youth Strategy, there are three key areas of activities, namely: participation, potential and prevention. It is in line with “An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering” (2009).

Participation implies active participation in society, development of institutional frameworks and spending quality leisure time. The second key area is potential, which means development of extraordinary results and achievements, formal and non-formal education and (self-)employment and entrepreneurship. The last key area, prevention, implies safe living, health and sustainable development.

It is important to stress that, to achieve the aforementioned objectives, it is necessary to provide conditions to realise two important goals, namely an increase in equal opportunities for all young people in society, and especially those living in tough conditions, and to increase the level of information that is available to young people at all levels and in all areas.

The action plan for the implementation of the strategy defines the activities, expected results, indicators of success, jurisdictions, deadlines, financial means, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy’s implementation, as well as the possibilities for its improvement.

Youth offices play a key role in conducting the strategy at local level, in informing young people and in realising different programmes and activities for youth. Programmes for youth are supported through the projects of youth associations and associations dealing with youth.

### → The role of the local youth offices

The Ministry of Youth and Sport provides the national framework and deals with the creation and implementation of national youth policy, but it is also necessary to engage local self-governments to deal with the needs of young people in the local community. The strategy envisages the establishment of local and regional youth offices that will have a key role in implementation of the goals defined by the document.

Up until the formation of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, only five municipalities in Serbia had a youth office, now there are 112 (October 2010). Also, six regional offices, established with the aim of providing efficient support, communication and exchanges of information in co-operation with the local youth offices, were opened. The goals of the local youth offices are: affirmation of young people and their inclusion in society, support for youth initiatives and projects, economic empowerment of young people, non-formal education of young people, youth information, promotion of voluntary work, and possibilities for spending quality leisure time.

The ministry is in charge of providing professional and advisory help to local authorities in the process of establishing local youth offices, for strengthening the capacities of local youth offices and for financing the programmes and projects of the local self-governed organisations in the youth policy field through different calls for tenders.

On the other hand, local self-government is in charge of providing space for the local youth office, allocating the financial means from the municipal budget for the office's work and choosing the co-ordinator of such an office.

The local youth office is the operational body within the municipality that: develops and implements local youth action plans, establishes co-operation with all relevant stakeholders and works on their networking in order to satisfy the needs of young people, provides technical, material and financial support to youth organisations and projects, conducts research and prints different publications.

Within the local youth office, young people can: obtain information about their rights and possibilities, attend different events, have free access to the Internet, organise social gatherings, cultural activities, etc.

### → Fund for Young Talent

The Fund for Young Talent was formed after a governmental decision of 24 July 2008; the Ministry of Youth and Sport was stipulated as the institution in charge of implementing its decisions. The National Youth Strategy is also to be partially implemented through the work of the fund.

One of the objectives of the fund is to enhance, develop, recognise and appraise the extraordinary achievements of young people in different fields. Through the articulation of this objective, the character of the strategy itself is expressed, which recognises young people as the potential and resource of society.

In previous periods, three types of open calls aimed at supporting the financial cost of education and helping gifted pupils and students were conducted:

- scholarships for the best 500 students that matriculated in graduate or post-graduate studies in EU countries and at the world's leading universities;
- scholarships for up to 1 000 of the best students to study in Serbia;
- awards for high school pupils and students who achieved the best results in national and international competitions in 2007.

In this way, from 2008 onwards, over 4 000 students have received scholarships/awards from the fund, including other types of support for young talent, and from different institutions and companies.<sup>52</sup> There are also possibilities for apprenticeships and study visits in foreign countries. A very important element of support for the personal and professional development of young talent is the centre for career guidance and counselling.

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52. For example, JAT Airways provides discounts on its regular routes for beneficiaries of the fund. Different institutions, organisations and companies – for example, the Volleyball Federation of Serbia, National Library and Microsoft – provide support in different ways

## → The future

The main objectives in future youth policy development in Serbia are: creating and developing institutional frameworks that are regulative without being restrictive in nature, which are absent to a great extent at present; developing and co-ordinating networks for the strategy's implementation through youth offices, youth programmes, support and co-operation between state bodies and the non-governmental sector; international co-operation; and making society aware of the importance of youth issues.

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