

# Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



## Pool of European Youth Researchers

### 7th Annual Meeting Report (2017)

**By Cristina Bacalso**

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this work, commissioned by the European Union–Council of Europe youth partnership, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of either of the partner institutions, their member states or the organisations co-operating with them.

## Introduction

The partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth seeks to create synergies between the two partner institutions to address the needs of young people and the wider youth field in Europe. To this end, the youth partnership convenes the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) to contribute to an informed European policy discourse, and promote evidence-based youth policy-making.<sup>1</sup>

Using the discussions at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the PEYR, the aim of this report is to answer the question: What role does the PEYR have in the promotion of youth research in Europe? In answering this question, the following sub-questions are asked: What are the current trends in youth research as evidenced by PEYR? What are the challenges facing youth research? What are the opportunities for future action?

The report is not intended to cover the full scale of work and research done on youth and youth policies in Europe, but rather a glimpse into the European youth research field by looking at the work that is supported by the partnership and its institutions through the PEYR. While providing an overview of the proceedings and activities at the PEYR annual meeting, this report also intends to help guide future directions for the youth partnership in its work to support research and knowledge production on youth.

### Challenges facing youth research

- *Much research on youth exists, however there is fragmentation among efforts and youth researchers themselves*
- *The disconnect between translating research for policy and practice persists*
- *Difficult political environments mean that evidence-based policy advice increasingly falls on deaf ears, or is even treated as threatening by governments*

### Opportunities for future action

- *Increase support for cutting-edge, new, or under-developed areas of youth research, to avoid duplication in other areas of youth research and to make the PEYR research agenda more relevant to current affairs*
- *Focus on the communication and dissemination of youth research, generated by the youth partnership, but also by PEYR members in their everyday work*
- *Provide more structured support to facilitate network-building and collaboration among youth researchers in Europe*

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<sup>1</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2014, *Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth: January 2014-December 2016*.

## Context of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the PEYR

### Aim and objective of the meeting

The PEYR meets once a year, with the aim to reflect on the work carried out in the past year, and propose ideas for future research in support of better youth policy and practice.<sup>2</sup> On 19-21 September 2017, the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting was held in Budapest, Hungary with 32 out of the 35 members in attendance.<sup>3</sup>

At the meeting, the youth partnership articulated additional aims including: providing a space for networking among the researchers and knowledge exchange, clarifying the role and mandate of the PEYR for the coming year (particularly for the new members, who made up a majority of the PEYR in this cycle), and for the PEYR members to provide constructive feedback to the youth partnership on what is working or what could be improved.

### Structure of the meeting

The meeting consisted of: a half-day joint meeting with the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) and the PEYR, which reviewed the synergies and interactions between the two groups, and the various thematic foci within the current EU-CoE youth partnership work plan; and a full-day meeting only for PEYR members, which focused on the areas of research and expertise of the PEYR members, examples of work of PEYR, a discussion on organising research by regions, and a discussion on present and future thematic research areas for the youth partnership work plan.

The youth partnership team facilitated the meeting, with some presentations made by veteran PEYR members. There was also considerable space for PEYR members to give their inputs, share their ideas, and bring forward new topics of discussion at any time during the meeting.

## What is the PEYR? (And what is it not?)

As per the Terms of Reference, the PEYR mission is to “contribute to improving knowledge about young people in Europe, European policy and practice in the field

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<sup>2</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 19 September 2017, “Annual meetings of the Pool of European Youth Researchers and of the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy”, *Council of Europe – European Union youth partnership: Resources*, <http://pip-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/meeting-2017>

<sup>3</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017, “EU-CoE youth partnership Correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Pool of European Youth Researchers 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting”, *Agenda and List of Participants*.

of youth through providing research, advice, analysis and perspectives on youth policy and youth work strategies”<sup>4</sup>.

It also lists four objectives<sup>5</sup>:

- To support the functioning of the EU-CoE youth partnership as a think-tank<sup>6</sup>;
- To actively contribute to knowledge development in the field of European youth policy and practice;
- To contribute with analyses of trends and developments in the youth field;
- To constitute a “task force” through exchange between its members, engagement with the wider youth research community, and with structures of youth policy and practice at the European level.

The youth partnership clarified that “task force” meant that the PEYR would be called on to respond to a specific policy or programming need through providing research, but that members could also propose their own research and share their own work.

Notably, the youth partnership explained that the PEYR is *not* a body with a collective identity. Rather, PEYR is meant to be a loose collective of individual youth researchers. There are no governance mechanisms for the PEYR to have a single voice or identity.

### Clusters of research areas undertaken by the PEYR

Individual members engage with the PEYR on a project-by-project basis, meaning that members can apply to work on specific youth partnership projects through an open tendering process. The overall research agenda – meaning the themes and topics of research-related projects – is set by the partner institutions according to its work plan. The partnership’s themes for 2017 are:

- **Participation/citizenship**, including new concepts and tools;
- **Social inclusion** with a focus on outreach, access to social rights, and fighting new forms of xenophobia and discrimination against vulnerable groups;
- Recognition and quality of **youth work**.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017a, *Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR): Call for Expression of Interest*.

<sup>6</sup> This “think tank” function relates the youth partnership’s “better knowledge” objective for 2017, which aims to “establish a clear picture of current and upcoming challenges and trends in participation for all young people, based on research evidence, sociological and statistical analysis and input from within and beyond the youth sector”. EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017b, “Partnership themes and objectives”, *About us*, <http://pip-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/priorities/objectives>

<sup>7</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017b.

While the PEYR cannot select its own themes, its members are invited to suggest and propose additional research areas that can be suggested to the partner organisations. Proposals made by the current PEYR are featured under “*New ideas: Thematic clusters and approaches proposed by the PEYR*”.

## **Expectations of the PEYR members for the mandate**

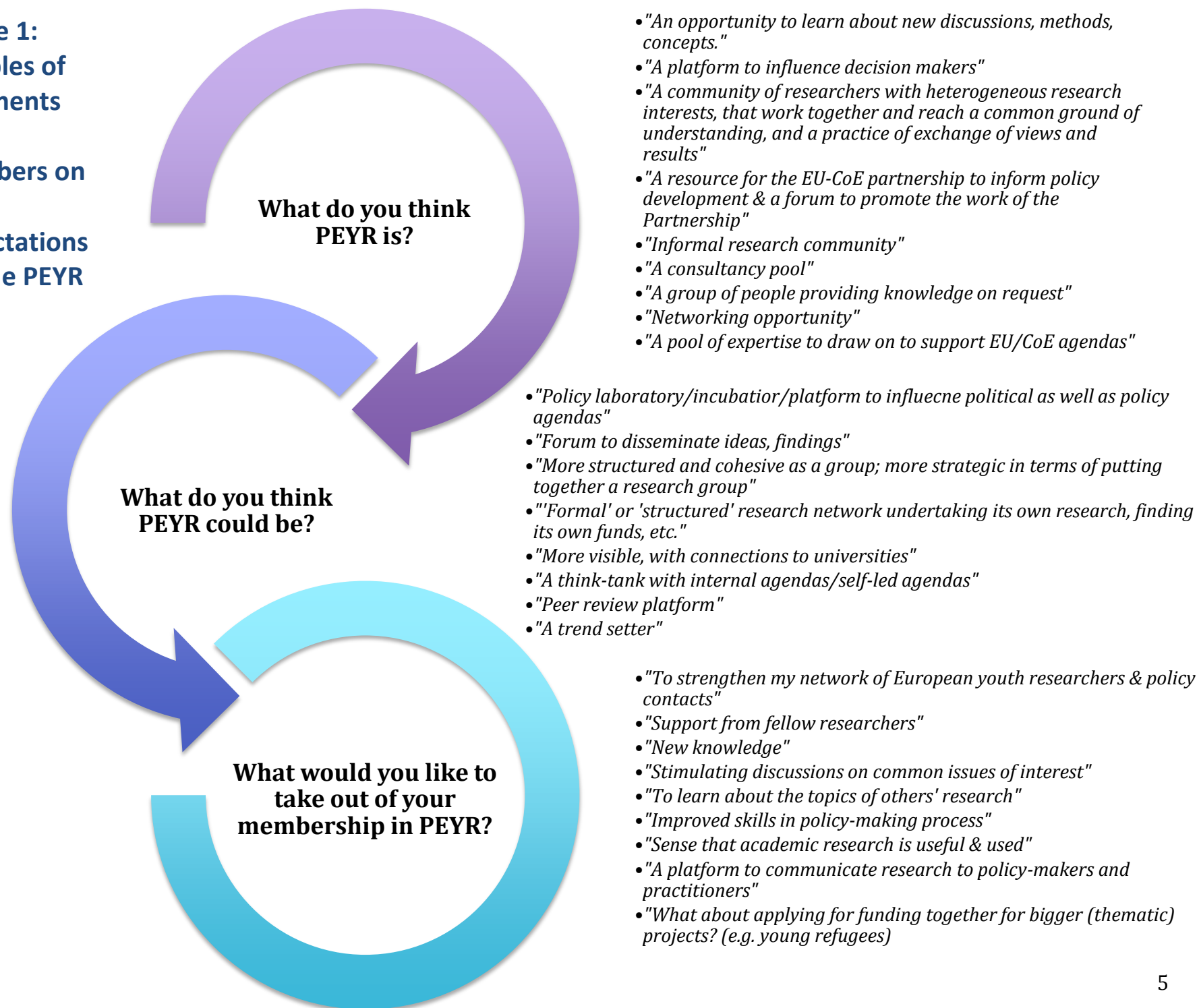
In an introductory activity, participants were asked to answer three questions in sequence: What do you think PEYR is? What do you think it could be? What would you like to take out of your membership in PEYR? Participants wrote their responses anonymously on sticky notes and placed them on the board, which were then read aloud to the group. The most common responses are depicted on the next page.

Interestingly, one common tension that emerged was around the *loose* versus *structured* nature of PEYR. While the current configuration of PEYR is intended to be an informal network, several members highlighted that they would like it to take on more formal and structured features – such as more structured ways of working, and modalities for sharing research beyond the once-a-year meeting and email – to facilitate more collaboration.

Another tension was the degree to which PEYR could function as a platform to communicate research to policy-makers and practitioners. While the mission and objectives as described in the Terms of Reference point to this function, this was brought up in several comments as an ambition – for PEYR to improve this role. Notably, this was also an agenda item in the joint EKCYP-PEYR meeting, where participants were asked to share success stories of communicating research, the biggest mistakes made, and ideas on how the youth partnership can help to avoid this.

Lastly, it is worth noting that many members hope for professional development and learning opportunities through their membership in the PEYR, beyond the skills and experience to be gained as a by-product of taking part in projects. Providing such opportunities to researchers appears to currently be outside the scope of the PEYR.

**Figure 1:  
Samples of  
comments  
from  
members on  
their  
expectations  
for the PEYR**



## What is youth research today? Current trends among PEYR researchers

*"I am not a youth worker, but an academic who researches youth.  
Should I be on the PEYR?" - A new member*

*"Its great to see youth workers who have decided to pursue a PhD in youth research,  
rather than only PhDs who have decided to focus on youth because it's the new  
'trend'." - A veteran member*

The PEYR brings together "youth researchers", however the definition of who and what this is, is intentionally wide. Members of the current PEYR included: academics who research youth in universities, from disciplines as diverse as Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology; independent research consultants who provide expert research services on youth to governments, UN agencies, and INGOs; researchers in think-tanks and other non-academic research institutions. Backgrounds of members ranged from career academics, to educators, to NGO workers and trainers, and youth workers.

The youth partnership emphasised that this interdisciplinary approach aims to bring together those with a *practice* background, with those more traditionally involved in *research*, to influence better practice and policy. PEYR therefore aims to exemplify the "Golden Triangle" of youth research, youth policy, and youth work, in its aim to conduct practice- and policy-relevant youth research to influence youth work and youth policy.<sup>8</sup>

### Areas of research and expertise of the PEYR members

The following page is a schematic representation of the all the areas of research and expertise of the PEYR members in their short, 3-minute presentations of their work at the meeting. The nodes that are outlined in glowing red denote the research areas that were most frequently mentioned among the group during the presentations:

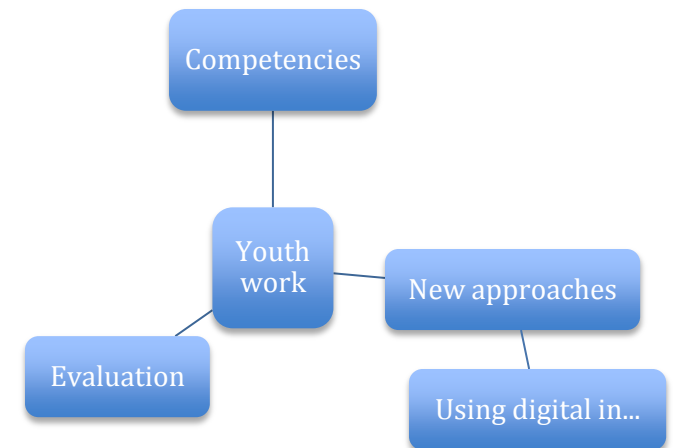
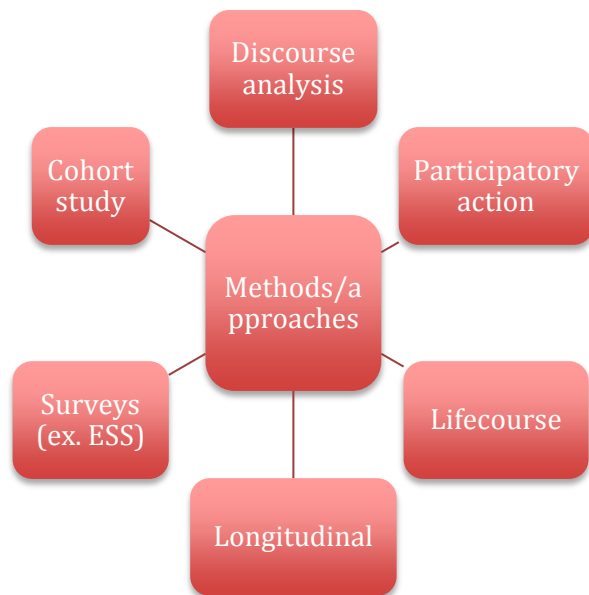
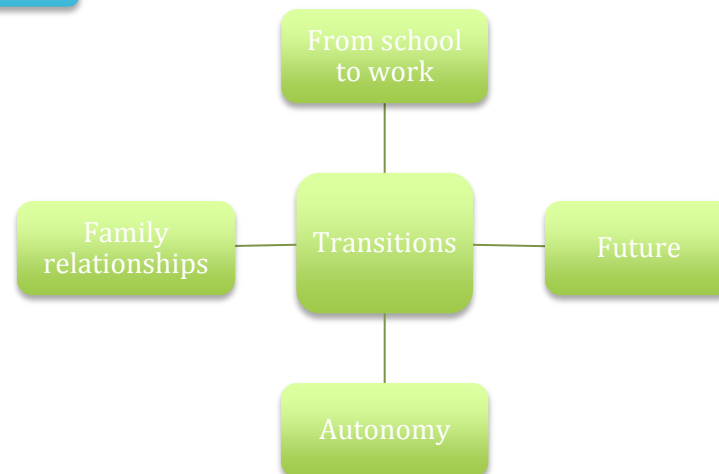
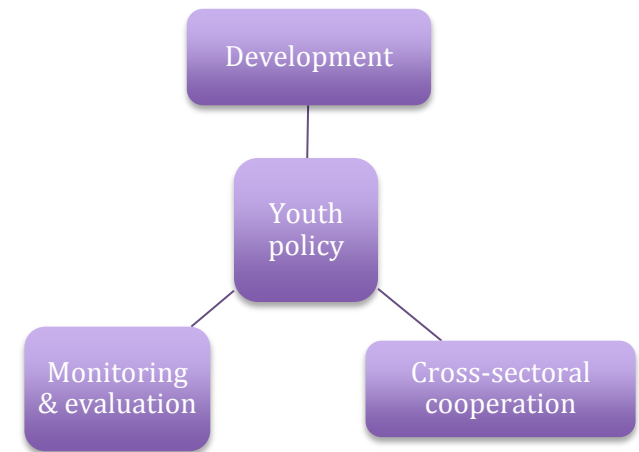
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<sup>8</sup> Milmeister, M. and Williamson, H. (eds.), 2006: Dialogues and networks: Organising exchanges between youth field actors, Luxembourg: Scientific – Editions PHI, accessed from EU-CoE youth partnership, 2007, "Golden Triangle", *Resources: Glossary on youth*, <http://pip-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/-/glossary/G/golden-triangle#golden-triangle>

**Figure 2: Schematic mapping of areas of research and expertise of PEYR members**







A few cursory observations can be made by looking at the breadth and scope of expertise covered by the PEYR members:

- ***The most popular themes are those that could be seen as traditionally associated with youth research – education, employment, and participation:*** These three themes were the most commonly mentioned in the presentations, covering a wide array of aspects within them.
- ***Many areas that are currently being covered by PEYR members reflect relevant themes and issues in policy-making in Europe:*** This includes more recent “hot button” policy issues, such as refugees, as well as on-going and topical issues of European relevance, such as mobility.
- ***Some areas – while recognised as important – are underrepresented in the PEYR, such as youth and technology:*** Notably, while youth and technology was brought up numerous times as an emerging topic of interest for youth, only a few members have expertise in this.
- ***There exists a variety of expertise in methods and approaches, independent of the research theme:*** Many members described a particular methodology approach or technique as a specialisation, in addition to a thematic area, representative of an array of data collection and analysis expertise in the PEYR.

### Types of work undertaken by the PEYR

To fulfill its mandate to provide “research, advice, analysis and perspectives on youth policy and youth work strategies”<sup>9</sup>, the PEYR’s work takes four forms: (1) Analytical papers; (2) Presentations and inputs during events; (3) Knowledge books and publications; (4) Representation of community of researchers at CoE statutory bodies.

Each type of work was presented by a veteran PEYR member based on his or her own experience of working on a particular project, to introduce to the new PEYR members the types of work they might engage in. A discussion of some opportunities and constraints followed each presentation, and are summarised below:

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<sup>9</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017a.

**Figure 3: Types of work undertaken by the PEYR**

<b>(1) Analytical papers: Produced for specific use by the Partnership (ex. for use in expert meetings, symposiums)</b>	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is a bridge between academic &amp; policy-makers</li> <li>- Has a specific audience and use case</li> <li>- Can be produced quickly in response to an emerging or topical issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Represents view of only one researcher; could be done by 2+ for further insight, improve on quality, opportunity for collaboration</li> <li>- Pre-set methodology &amp; analytical frame can be constraining</li> </ul>
<b>(2) Presentations and inputs during events: Providing expert input and presentations at conferences for attendees</b>	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensures participants at events begin from same knowledge-base; sets the stage for more fruitful discussions</li> <li>- Researcher is expert resource for participants at conference, to deepen understanding of topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can be faced with dilemma of representing yourself versus representing the Partnership</li> <li>- When presenting a paper, use can be limited to the event itself and not fully disseminated through other channels afterwards</li> </ul>
<b>(3) Youth knowledge books and publications: Publications where the authors and editorial team can be made up of PEYR members (though not exclusively)</b>	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allows for deeper exploration of themes and issues</li> <li>- Can be used by a wider audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Editing is very time consuming</li> <li>- While aimed for a wider audience, it is unclear if the dissemination is effective</li> <li>- Collaboration involving many authors &amp; editors more difficult to coordinate</li> </ul>
<b>(4) Representation of community of researchers at CoE statutory bodies: Members of PEYR participate (in an observer role) at joint and advisory council meetings</b>	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allows PEYR to have insight into decision-making bodies through listening, perceiving, and bringing back reflections from the meeting</li> <li>- Is a networking opportunity with actors from local policy context</li> <li>- Ensures that the role of research (and researcher) is represented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has danger of becoming tokenistic – PEYR is present but may not have a voice (is not clear to what extent they can “participate”)</li> <li>- Cannot speak on behalf of PEYR (as PEYR has no collective identity) therefore limited/unclear opportunity for influence</li> <li>- Difficult local political climate for youth policy influencing can limit effectiveness of networking</li> </ul>

## New ideas: Thematic clusters and approaches proposed by the PEYR

### Research by regions: Could it work?

The last half-day of the meeting was devoted to new ways of working for the PEYR. One discussion looked at a proposal to design PEYR research projects using a regional approach. This would be *in addition* to the current thematic approach, where projects are organised according to research clusters defined by the partner institutions in the work plan.

In proposed regional groupings (South-Med; Eastern Europe and Caucasus; South-East Europe; Central, Nordic and Western Europe; Southern Europe), participants were asked to discuss the potential opportunities and risks of this approach, and what outputs could potentially look like. Some key reflections are summarised below:

- ***Not all of the proposed regions made sense***, namely for the group Central, Nordic and Western Europe. This region was seen as too geographically large and diverse to enable meaningful comparison. Moreover, Poland did not see itself as belonging to the Eastern Europe and Caucasus group, however also not fitting neatly within the Central, Nordic and Western Europe group.
- ***Regions where countries share common history and are similar linguistically and culturally, could meaningfully be approached this way***, such as Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, or a new grouping of Portugal, Italy, Spain. Regions could also be better modeled off of existing socio-political or cultural clusters, such as the Eastern Partnership.
- ***Could be used to devote research to under-researched areas that are often missed or overlooked in comparative research***, such as South East Europe, and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.
- ***A regional approach for PEYR therefore would be useful for some regions, but not all***, specifically those that lend themselves well to comparative research due to common culture and history.

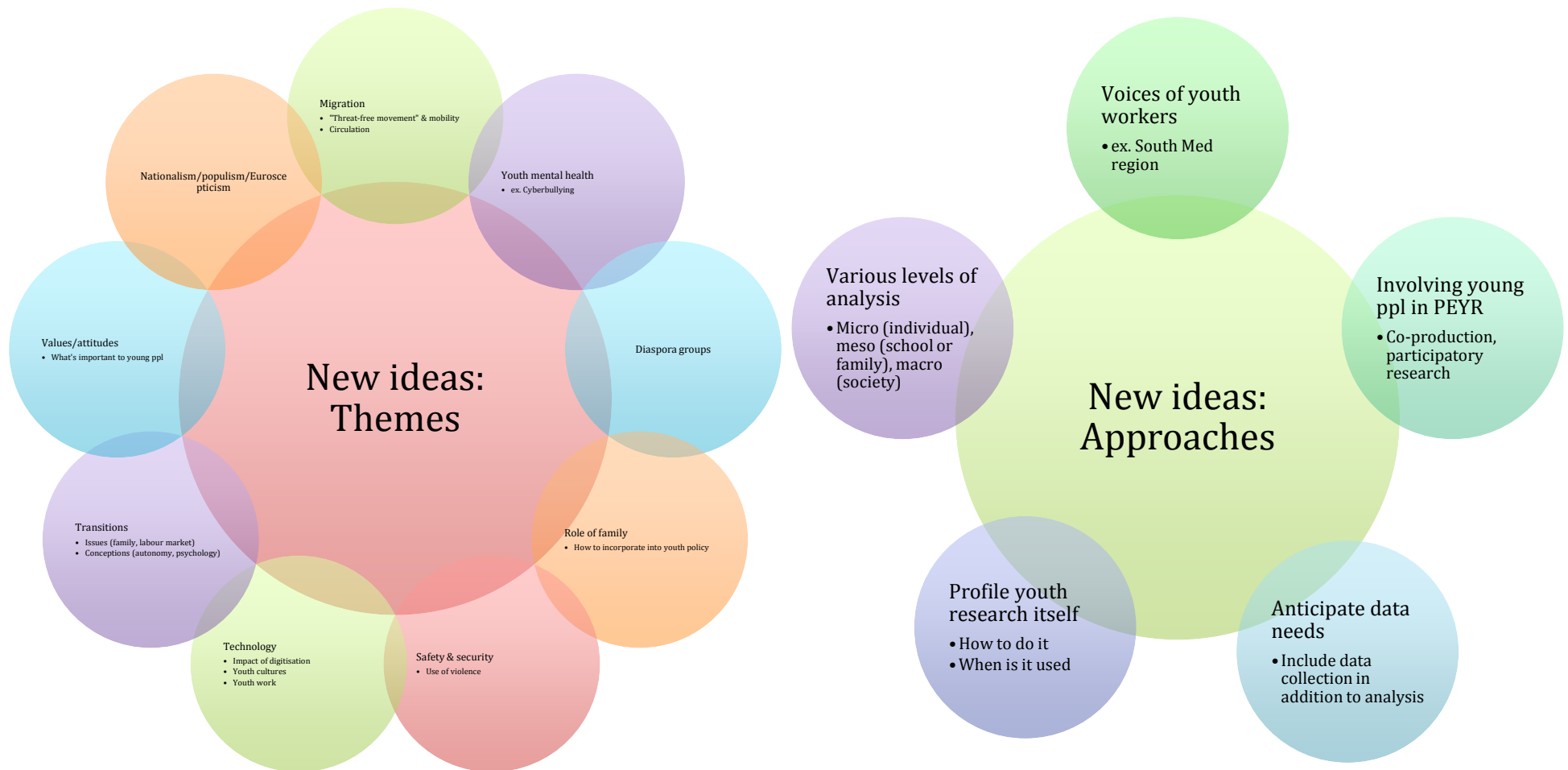
### Research by theme: New clusters of research areas (and ways of working)

The youth partnership's current horizontal priority of "better knowledge" has three themes for 2017: Participation, inclusion, and youth work.<sup>10</sup> While the PEYR cannot select its own research themes for projects, its members are invited to propose additional research areas that can be suggested to the partner organisations for consideration in the following year's work plan. Members suggested new ideas for research clusters, but also for approaches, which are summarised on the next page.

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<sup>10</sup> EU-CoE youth partnership, 2017b.

**Figure 4: New research themes and approaches proposed by PEYR**



A few key reflections can be made when looking at the recommendations for future themes and ways of working:

- ***Many of the themes are topical and relate to “hot-button” political and social issues in Europe:*** The emphasis on migration, diaspora groups, as well as nationalism, populism, and Euroscepticism, reflect the issues that are of increasing relevance in media, and among policy-makers in Europe. There appears to be a desire for youth partnership research to more quickly respond to these trends.
- ***Technology is of increasing interest and relevance to youth researchers:*** Members would like to have more opportunities to explore youth and technology, namely the impact of digitisation on youth wellbeing, youth cultures online, and how technology can be used in youth work. The next symposium will be on youth and digitisation, and members recommended more specific themes such as: Pedagogical support for youth workers on using digital technologies in their practice; Education on internet use for young people; Good practices for using online methodologies for research; Mapping digital skills initiatives and digital literacy programmes in Europe; Impact of gaming on work and skill development for young people. It is worth noting that only a few PEYR members mentioned technology as part of their research expertise, so the desire to focus more on technology can also be seen as a professional development opportunity for members to broaden their knowledge and skills.
- ***Need to know more about young people, in addition to analysis:*** There is a need to conduct some research activities that focus on collecting primary data and research on young people, in addition to research that uses secondary source analysis. An example of this is to collect data on values and attitudes of young people, which could be gathered through quantitative (ex. surveys) or qualitative (ex. interviews, focus groups) methods. This could potentially be linked to the work of the EKCYP, however exact ways of doing so were not discussed.

## Conclusion: Challenges facing youth research and opportunities for future action

Underlying the aims and objectives of the PEYR is to give more voice to research, meaning to help increase the status and visibility of youth and youth issues on the political agenda. When reflecting on the discussions at the PEYR annual meeting, several challenges to influencing policy, practice, and the political agenda exist, as well as to youth research as a whole:

- ***Much research on youth exists, however there is fragmentation among efforts and youth researchers themselves***

A common fear that was brought up throughout the meeting was that after the annual PEYR meeting was over, much of the momentum, energy, and ideas would be lost when members would return back to their homes. It is clear that while PEYR is an effort to build bridges among youth researchers, the default for many is to work independently and in silos. This may be why many members expressed the desire for more structure and formal modes of knowledge sharing, as previous unguided efforts have not been successful. Multiple benefits of closer collaboration between youth researchers were mentioned: to avoid fragmentation when competing for limited resources, to use complimentary projects and skills to enhance one another's work, and to avoid duplication.

- ***The disconnect between translating research for policy and practice persists***

At a time of persistent marginalisation of young people<sup>11</sup>, the need for evidence-based interventions is high, however many youth researchers expressed that they lack the skills and platforms to communicate translate their research into forms and mediums that could be used to influence policies, practice, and the broader society. While PEYR provides them an opportunity to engage in research projects that have the potential to influence policy and practice, many members expressed the desire to develop this as a key skill, and to have even more platforms to showcase their own research in their every day work. Even within youth partnership projects, members of both PEYR and EKCYP questioned if enough emphasis was placed on the dissemination of their work beyond putting it on the youth partnership website.

- ***Difficult political environments mean that evidence-based policy advice increasingly falls on deaf ears, or is even treated as threatening by governments***

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<sup>11</sup> Pollack, G., 2017, "Young people, contemporary challenges, and the future trends", prepared for EU-CoE youth partnership, 12-14 June 2017, *Symposium on Youth Policy Responses to Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People*, Prague, Czech Republic.

In some EU and/or Council of Europe countries, the current political climate is such that the public intellectual is seen as a threat to governments, and youth researchers are no exception. While the “Golden Triangle” of research, policy, and practice is aspirational, it in part also depends on an enabling governance environment that is open, transparent, and democratic. This is a constraint on the role and work of youth researchers, whose output may have no discernable influence on policy-making in the country, or in some cases, may even be seen as threatening to the ruling regimes.

### Opportunities for future action for the PEYR

- ***Increase support for cutting-edge, new, or under-developed areas of youth research, to avoid duplication in other areas of youth research and to make the PEYR research agenda more relevant to current affairs***

As seen from the schematic mapping of expertise among the PEYR members, the most popular research is done in areas traditionally associated with youth research. This means that in their daily work, outside of the PEYR, members are producing research predominantly in the areas of education, employment, and participation. To avoid duplication, PEYR could focus its efforts more in areas that appear to be under-researched. This includes increasing focus on themes within its own priority area, such as youth work and social inclusion, but also other emerging areas. Members proposed many new research clusters that could be included in the youth partnership work plan, which focus on more topical themes such as migration and nationalism, and topics relating to youth and technology.

PEYR could also play a useful role in filling research gaps, such bringing a comparative view to areas that are typically under-researched (ex. South East Europe), and also to engage in primary research data collection, such as a study on attitudes and values of young people in Europe..

- ***Focus more on the communication and dissemination of youth research, generated by the youth partnership, but also by PEYR members in their everyday work***

The youth partnership could enhance its own dissemination of its research to diverse audiences, as well as enhance the capacity of PEYR members to communicate their own research, to enhance the visibility of youth research as a whole in Europe. In the former, new mediums (ex. video, documentary) could be used to communicate research findings to a wider audience. In the latter, skill development workshops that focus on communicating and disseminating research could be provided to PEYR members, as well as expanding the functionality of the youth partnership website, to more usefully showcase and promote new and upcoming research.



- ***Provide more structured support to facilitate network-building and collaboration among youth researchers in Europe***

There is a notable desire among many PEYR members to have more formal modalities of sharing knowledge, good practice, and ideas beyond the once-a-year meeting. While the youth partnership emphasises that such activities need to rely on the initiative of individual members, new networks are unlikely to have any success without some initial support, infrastructure, and guidance to get it started. The youth partnership is well-placed to play this role – as a convener of youth researchers, and of multiple actors throughout the sector; as a promoter of synergies between actors, with the birds-eye perspective on how and where networks could be built and how they could be most useful; and as a champion of supporting collaborative youth research.