



WP3

**National Report
Analysis of Expert Interviews**

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Introduction

CATCH-EyoU investigates the European youth citizenship to reach a deeper understanding of the topic, to better the policies and bring the European citizens even closer together. The report is a part of ‘Work Package 3’ (WP3), and covers the interview analysis with experts. The aim of the part-project is to examine the current youth policy discourses in the European Union, to clarify how these policies are decided upon and implemented in practice. The package is divided into two main studies, one document analysis of national policies (national report 1) and one semi-structural interview analysis (national report 2) with politicians, public officials and youth organization representatives at different levels. The studies are then compared and further compiled in a cross-national report examine the overall findings and policy recommendations across EU. This is the second national report of Sweden, covering the expert interview analysis.

1.1 Participants

The sample is based on the operative political level (national or regional/local) and the position (public official, politician or youth organization representative). Each respondent is coded with two letters and one number according to the following scheme:

	National level			Local/regional level		
	Public official	Politician	Youth organization	Public official	Politician	Youth organization
Respondent 1	ON1	PN1	YN1	OL1	PL1	YL1
Respondent 2	ON2	PN2	YN2	OL2	PL2	YL2

O=Public Official, P=Politician, Y=Youth organization representative, N=National level, L=Local/regional level

Twelve persons working with or having responsibilities for youth policies were in total selected, with at least two of each group to provide an equal distribution between the variables to enhance (possibly) different perspectives.

Table 1.2

	Code	Organization	Level	Representation
1	(ON1)	The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF)	National	Public officials
2	(ON2)	State Secretary to Youth Minister	National	Public officials
3	(PN1)	Ministry of Education and Research /Division for Youth Policy and Civil Society	National	Politician
4	(PN2)	Member of the National Committee of Culture	National	Politician
5	(YN1)	The National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (LSU)	National	Youth organization representative
6	(YN2)	The Youth Council of Sweden	National	Youth organization representative
7	(YN3)	The Swedish National Association for Disabled Children and Youth People (RBU)	National	Youth organization representative
8	(OL1)	Region Örebro County	Regional	Public officials
9	(OL2)	Västerås Municipality	Local	Public officials
10	(PL1)	Region Örebro County	Regional	Politician
11	(PL2/YL2)	Chairperson – The youth affiliation of a political party in Region Örebro County	Regional	Politician/Youth organization representative
12	(YL1)	Member of the Steering Committee of the New School of Karlslund	Local	Youth organization representative

1.2 Outline

The analysis is structured around nine themes to explore the policy discourse; the relation to EU (1), the national youth policy aim (2), the perception of youths in relation to society (3), the problem definition (4), solutions (5), the perception of youths as an actor/non-actor (6) and responsible youth policy actors (7). The findings are then compared to the policy analysis in the first national report of the package (8) and at last some concluding reflections are presented.

Theme 1: EU and the National Youth Policy

The respondents are mainly referring to EU in three different ways – as a regulative institution, as a practice (structural dialogue, cooperation, peer learning, Erasmus+ etc.) and as a source of financial support. Most of them mix the various types in their description while others provide more of a one dimensional perspective of the concept.

Two of the respondents leap out from the others; PN1 who is working at the Ministry of Education and Research /Division for Youth Policy and Civil Society, whereas EU is a part of the daily work, and YL1 who is working at a football organization/school and hence has very

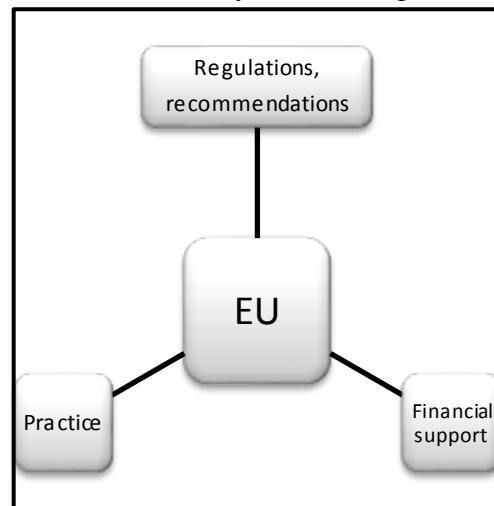


Figure 1.1

limited references to political influence in general. In between them are two sub-groups; those who can relate to the EU but do not consider it affective (small references, negative), and those who can relate to EU and experience some EU influences in their daily work (small references, positive), with a heavy emphasis on the first one.

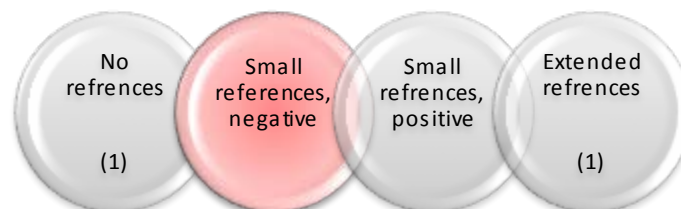


Figure 1.2

These dominating responses are characterized by a critique against the EU involvement in the policy area, considering it as non-relevant, too ‘fuzzy’ or too general to make sense in practical work.



(..) But the EU-politics are not dominating in the policy area, there are just policy conclusions, some vague recommendations, quite general discussions. I do not consider the EU as a significant actor at all regarding youth politics and democracy issues among youths. (ON2)

There are probably influences in single cases but not as significant as in other countries who completely lacked youth policies and whereas the European youth policy was something new to bring back home. (ON1)

One respondent really catch the phenomena by the description of the structural dialogue in Sweden as a parallel system; even though EU is present, it does not seem to influence the practical work.

But I see the structural dialogue in Sweden as a parallel system to many other dialogues going on. The minister has a youth council which discuss the political youth issues, but it is also a structural dialogue, and how they are interrogated.. It was up for discussion during the proposal writing and I was trying to add that it should not be parallel systems and that we instead should extend the European structural dialogue. But I did not manage, hence they are still parallel systems and concurrently it is an elite project, both in the EU and in Sweden, I think. (ON1)

This description can possibly be related to a kind of passive resistance against the EU youth politics, and a critique of top-down steering at the policy area, which is possible to discern in many of the interviews.

The problem is that the youth politics do not belong to the EU competence. EU cannot decide that all countries shall implement certain youth policies, there is not even a specific policy area. In many countries it is a part of the cultural politics or sport politics or just educational politics, and some countries do not even have an outspoken political responsibility for youth politics. (ON2)

Well, what should EU do about youth housing? We have to take action at the local and national level, because it is not an EU-issue. But it is always up for discussion, education, work, housing.. But what? What shall EU do about it? (PN2)

(..) the EU youth policy could definitely be more clarified at the national level, in other words what it means and how it influences the organizations, but primary at the local level. It is not clear to us independent organizations how EU affect the practical work. (YN2)

Another possible explanation of the absence of EU mentioned is the similarities with the Swedish national youth policies, which makes it hard to distinguish the influence. Sweden is by some respondents perceived as a role-model and the influence is thus inverted according to the respondents.



The last structural dialogue resulted in recommendations and a 'toolbox'. The toolbox included strategies to implement the recommendations at home. But Sweden have already implemented most of these recommendations. Thanks to our competent representatives but also our well-developed youth politics, Sweden and our delegation have instead played a central role in defining the recommendations and the toolbox. (YN2)

You know, Sweden was involved in the youth policy making process in 2009 – concurrently as we held presidency, and it is valid to 2018. I think it has been important, especially to new member states, to support the progress of the own national youth policy. (..) It has not been the case with Sweden, the national youth policy have remained independent and EU has only contributed to some parts. (PN1)

These strains are surprisingly most prominent at the national level, whereas the local and regional seem to be more positive to the EU-cooperation and its' regulative body, hence their problem definition turns in a rather different direction.

I have indeed recognized an increasing interest of EU, how EU works with current issues related to regional development and cultural planning for example. You are trying to connect to the EU-perspective, and it has not always been like this. Sweden have always run its' own race, but EU is now getting more and more of importance. The problem is the bureaucracy. (..) It is too complicated. Way too complicated in relation to the financial support (..) (OL1)

The respondent experiences an increasing interest of the EU, and is further in the interview describing a willingness to take effort to implement the EU youth policy. But it is hindered by the complexity of the EU-system. The limited resources which characterize small municipalities, but also small organizations in general, makes it hard to interact with EU.

(..) we only have these resources, we are not more than what we are and the council here is small and if should be done it has to be at our national level, because it is much harder for the locals' to organize such a cooperation. (YN3)

Another problem which appears in the local work relates to cooperation between the member states.

It is quite hard, we have tried, and we have been on study visit and such. (..) We were visiting Ireland the last semester, before summer, but their platforms are completely different. The social workers are talking about alcohol and drugs by a perspective we are not used to. We are used to work with a supportive perspective, we want to create passion around the activities at our agency which make them [the youths] come for fun, not because of their problems. They [Ireland] got a lot of problems with addiction and then they create these dreary milieus. You are not able to influence them either. (OL2)



This cooperation problem is also mentioned at the national level, whereas the respondent experiences a development of a parallel structure within the EU, where some countries run their own race without the rest of the member states.

(..) you may not talk about it, but when there is communication and such, there are a kind of internal core of countries that to say, work more with the youth policy and a like, but it is often constructed around personal relationships and such things which is hard to grasp, which Sweden does not think is good to the EU cooperation, that it develops kinds of pseudo structures, but so it is. (PN1)

Summing up the EU seems to play a minor role in the national politics. Similar policy but also a resistance appears to be the main explanation of its absence, even though other explanations also are provided. What is further recognized, and probably related to these findings, is the problem to even define national youth politics – which will be examined in the next theme.



Theme 2: The Aim of the National Youth Policy

The national youth policy is described as a trans-sectorial domain, formally assigned to the administration of culture but crossing through a cluster of policy areas. It makes it fluent and hard to grasp, it is both something and everything and seems to lack a clear definition. None of the respondents points out any specific national youth policy of importance, the bill of youth is mentioned, but other resources such as peer learning and youth panels are perceived as more importance to the practical work. Although, beyond its' abstractness, all respondents have a similar view of the purpose of the national youth politics – *inclusion, to be a part of the society.*

You know.. According to the government's message, the youths shall feel that they have good living conditions and so on.. That part is extremely important, that it, you know, catches the feeling that you have a proper influence in your everyday life and it is like an umbrella to me.. To try to.. How can we reach it? (OL2)

It is possible to distinguish two policy aims in order to reach this overarching goal. At first we have the '*hard values*' – job, houses and education, values which are touchable and which concepts is more or less undiscussable (to simplify it). Secondly there are '*soft values*' which is related to democracy and citizenship. These values are of more intangible character and hence harder to specify and evaluate in statistics. The respondents are mostly describing these by its' negotiations such as extremism.

If I would say something about the Swedish policy, it is that it has at the moment a huge focus upon the youths' establishment in adulthood. In the economics you often talk about youth unemployment, how will youths get a job, like, in the sociology you are talking a lot about the transition from school to work, what does it look like, to go from adolescence to become an adult, what does it look like? And a lot proves, in many studies, that this transition has become more difficult, it was much easier before when youths could get, you got a summer job and then you kept that occupation, and then you established slowly, you got a home.. Nowadays it is hard to find an own home, harder to get a job and more people do not finish school. (..) But in an increasing degree, I would also say that you in addition have begun to talk about, how to say, the democratic schooling, and not at least I would say that this debate has accentuated after the terror attack against Charlie Hebdo, whereas the education and youth politics began to talk about that we have missed something. (ON2)

I think it is.. It is the influential issues, in other words the democratic issues, to feel that you are able to influence, in other words the feeling of coherence as you say, that you are a part of the society, that you have a role in the society to fill (..) (OL1)



But why is it important, why should it be at the political agenda? The main reason seem to be philosophical; the respondents are talking about *rights* – the right to employment and the right to influence. But here are also other motives such as economical costs and security.

But it is the issue of occupation and the right to employment, it must be one of the most.. I mean that is the mission that the government have given us very explicit as a main mission, to both get knowledge about those how stand outside the employment market and studies and it is not.. It is not just a Swedish problem, it is an European problem and I think that it has to be the most important issue because all our statistics and inquires shows that if you do not.. If you are outside employment and studies during a longer period it risks to become really long-lasting and it is something that neither Europe nor Sweden can afford (..) (ON1)

You know, our organization is pretty much an organization that works with the youths' right to democratic rights for the rights sake. We are working a lot with the youths' right to democracy, the youths' right to organize themselves (..) (YN2)

In so far the national youth policy is characterized by consensus. But the practical work is multifaceted and a complex, straggly depiction of the youth policy work emerges from the data. Various projects to engage the youths and youth panels are set out, but is hard to evaluate, and it is unclear which kind of youths the innovations reach.

(..) I think it is much about racing enthusiasts, either at.. Among the high-level officials at the municipality or among the politicians, so it is much about an own.. An own driving force and an engagement in.. In these issues. (YN1)

Definitely. We do have a great luck here in Västerås, I have to say it, we have had a great political foundation to invest in such works, we have been a municipality with, how to say, a lot of resources, have been listening and they [the politicians] have been listening to the needs of the agencies. And if I listen to the municipalities around our own county, I hear other stories, so you become a bit blind of your advantages sometimes, so it is nice to meet other municipalities and hear that we are doing quite well. (OL2)

Undefined objectives may serve as a shock absorber, making it everything and nothing blurs out the conflict lines but may risk to result in ad hoc projects which are disconnected to each other.

You know, the youth's influence and the youth's possibilities to get involved and influence is quite uncontroversial as long as you are talking about the general level, but of course there are parts of the policy area which are controversial. (ON1)

It has been very blurry, I mean, the financial politics have a framework, you know, what you shall achieve, the employment politics.. There are clearly defined objectives. You shall increase the occupation degree, you shall decrease the unemployment rates.. The industrial policy.. You shall



increase the concurrence.. There are clearly defined objectives, it has not been any clearly defined objectives in the youth policy. (ON2)



But it may also be the Swedish national youth policy's advantage, though it makes various actors to cooperate and find efficient solutions. It may be easier to trace the result by central steering, but it may not be the most efficient way to do it. Many of the respondents express a sense of pride of the Swedish civil society and points out the importance of decentralisation to reach the policy goal.

Theme 3: The Society and the Youths

When the respondents are referring to the concept 'youths' they are consistently talking about people around 16-25 years old, but the category is fluent and heavily dependent upon the individual and its' establishment in adulthood. It refers to the time between childhood and adulthood, to break free from your parents and become independent.

(..) Yes, but to be young is to be.. You are in the borderland between, you know, break free, maybe study, move out.. I think the UN's definition of youth is up to 25 [years] or something like that. (PL2/YL2)

It means that you may be considered a youth even when you are older than 25 years, but also younger than 16. There is general recognition that the adolescence is shorter in Sweden comparing to other European countries, which the respondents relate to differences in the labor- and housing markets, but also that the adolescence is much longer than before due to difficulties to find a job and an own home. The concept has lately become more static, probably because of the development of a national youth policy and EU-cooperation in the area, whereas some respondents use the age limit of the Erasmus+ project as a guideline.

(..) 17 to 25 [years old] is my opinion, but there are of course, you may, in my opinion, discuss.. We have a lot of youths who are tired of school, many would need a Sabbatical year already after the 9th grade but it is almost.. It is really impossible to find a job these days. I know when I was.. It was the last century, I had two friends back then, classmates who dropped out already in the 8th grade and started to work at the industry, but it does not happen these days. (PN2)

Yes, we have and it is sprawling a bit and such. And it messes up when it comes to things such as indicators and material and statistics and such things, but it is getting closer.. It was much more sprawling when I started in 2009, but now there are becoming a mutual understanding of what it [adolescence] is, and then you are almost always relying on the group included in the Erasmus+ program, you are talking about 13 to 25 years [old], while some countries in the south Europe want to extend it up to 30 years [old] and further. (PN1)



There are further a tendency to divide youths into two sub-groups; resourceful and vulnerable youths, and the way the respondents are talking about them is reliant upon the group discussed. When talking about the first one the focus is upon the youths as a social resource and the policy efforts are to stimulate these groups even further by for example entrepreneurship projects. The latter is the 'problem part', a risky group which is in need for innovation to not fall into extremism or mental illness. Youths who do not finish school, who get stuck in unemployment and do not believe in their own future. *Polarization* is one concept to describe the relationship between these groups, and one of the policy aims are hence to decrease this divergence.

(..) because they have obligated school attendance, but they do not have any other obligations. And when the school obligation do not work, who catches them up then? Then it is internet and subcultures and criminality and so on.. And to handle these groups is extremely important especially when the society gets polarized.. In a society.. Sweden has been an extremely homogenous society of consensus with a lot of.. You know despite that we have think differently regarding the left and right wing politics and which is followed by small, half-revolutionary movements, it has been to a high degree a country of consensus. (ON2)

You are saying that the youths shall get more education or bla bla bla, but many youths are feeling that, you know the upper secondary school, there are many who do not finish the upper secondary school and it is very difficult for youths to get a job if you have not done all that (..) (PL2/YL2)

In addition, the respondents tend to talk about immigrated youths as a divergent group with special needs, which is probably an effect of the refugee crisis.

(..) And I would think it.. It will accentuates even further because of the refugee situation we are facing, because what is happening is two things which are interesting and challenging in the perspective of democracy.. First of all we [EU] have received a really, really huge amount of refugees in a really, really short time to EU and many of them ends up in Sweden and then follows the question, how shall we help these people to get into the Swedish society and become active citizens? (ON2)

Another, not so prominent divergence is between male and females, and the recognition of the different challenges these groups are facing; males are to a higher degree struggling with school and the reading comprehension is much lower compared to the females, whilst the girls are struggling with mental illness and discrimination in the labor market.

(..) We see that the boys are still getting better jobs and more salaried jobs and such and the girls are doing better in school, the girls are more.. have bigger problems.. I would not say mental illness, but mental problems in the sense that you are feeling bad (..) (PL1)



One dimension excluded is the disabled youths. Some respondents mention it quickly, but are not a prominent category when talking about youths. It is clearly prominent in the interview with the RBU representative, who is also fighting for the rights of young people but with disabilities, but *he cannot relate the group to or does not experience inclusion in the youth politics.

No, I would indeed not say that and there are some.. if you are taking the outset from what is written there are always such extract of which you shall take outset, you shall especially focus on those people who apply to the law of discrimination for example but I do not think you manage to do it, but okay, you have to start somewhere and it is probably good that these writings exist.
(YL3)

The extract and the absence of this group indicate that the concept of 'youth' is somehow normative and refers to people without physical disabilities.

To conclude the youths are perceived as a heterogenic group with the right to participate in society and shape their own living. The increasing demands and difficulties to find a job and home have created a gap between youths, resulting in unequal opportunities when entering adulthood. The core is not positive nor negative, to say youths as a resource or as a societal risk, but rather a group which needs support to fulfil their own potential. It leads on to the question if it is relevant to talk about 'youths' as a specific group at all?



Theme 4: Young People's Problems in Society – Society's problems with Young People

The problem definition can partly be found in the *policy aim*, presented in 'Theme 2'. The keyword of the section is *inclusion* and indicates that the youths are not or at least have problems to get included in the society, both in terms of entering adulthood, but also to make us of their rights. In addition the problem causes societal effects such as high economical costs and security risks.

Many [youths] are drug addicts. Many are half criminals, are living in strange sub cultures, I can say that.. But look at my son's class for example, there were unusually many, I think three boys in the class.. He is 18 [years old] right now, when he went to compulsory school there were three boys that had difficulties already in the lower school, you saw immediately, and you know "my god, you have to do something" and the school probably did a lot but not enough. Today I see those guys hanging around, because they are still living in the same area, one of them is.. He was superthin when he was young, but now he is heavy-set and overweight, but you can see that he is on some kind of treatment because he is slow and, yeah.. Medicated in some sense. One of them is some kind of a local mini-gangster, has his own small gang of younger boys which he is bossing around nearby the school.. (ON2)

As examined in the previous section, two main problems are related to the concept, at first there are difficulties to find a job and an apartment, to make their own living.

Yes, it is primary job, education, it is one of the most important issues because it.. if you do not have a job it gets very difficult.. you cannot pay bills, you cannot move out.. it is probably what most youths are thinking about when they get summer break or end school, "what shall I do with my life and how shall I make out my living?" (PL2/YL2)

The problem is mainly addressed to the increasing educational demands, which makes it hard for youths who do not finish school to enter adulthood. When they cannot find a job, they cannot afford an own apartment, and its' starts a negative spiral of alienation.

And when I went.. I am not high educated because I started to work directly, so to me it was job and now you have to apply for education and then job, so it has changed in 45 years. It has changed quite dramatically, people like me do not exist anymore. (PL1)

(..) there is a thing which scientists call 'gearing effects', you know 'labeling effects' or 'close-up effects' and we have looked at those who belongs to the NEET-group [not in Education, Employment or Training], youths 1-2-3 years in the beginning of 2010, no 2001, during the crisis back then, and we have followed them up to ten years later, what happened to them.. Because we have total register data, we were able to do a twin study. So we found twins who have been in this NEET-group, and twins who have not been in and then we compared them with an older group, which also were NEETs you know.. (*not hearable*).. and then we looked ten years later, and it proves that if you have been in this group for one year or longer, than the probability is very high



that you will be stuck in the group ten years later or not have a job or are sick or are earning badly. In other words, you are not an established part of the society ten years later, so in a.. or in a democratic perspective, long-term alienation, especially this far away from the labor market, makes people fall out from the society, not just the labor market but you are falling out from the societal structure. (ON2)

The second part of the problem is influence; youths are perceived to have difficulties to make their voice heard which is both an individual and a democratic problem. This issue is two-folded, partly be described by two types of perspectives; *top-down* and *bottom-up*, in the sense of where the problem lays. In the top-down perspective the problem lays in the hands of the youths. They 'lack of knowledge' or have 'low self-esteem', and hence the focus is to educate and support the youths to become more independent.

We often see that there are a lot of youths who are interested in changing the public transport but do not know that they have to do it at the county or regional level. (..) We see that the two main causes of the youth non-engagement are mainly that they either do not believe that people will listen, or they experience that they do not know how to impinge (..) Because it is usually the case that youths are excluded because they do not feel that they have the power but also because they are steamrollered in the sense that they do not get the chance and that you must have a certain knowledge and a certain rhetoric to gain influence. (YN2)

The bottom-up perspective is rather focused upon the adults' unwillingness or failure to include young people in the policy making process.

(..) it is that way when you are young, people do not expect you to be competent, neither knowing, so you got a lot to prove, but some adults are welcoming us with open arms. But there are also those who do not, and I think it is because they think we [the youths] are rivals. (PL2/YL2)

(..) the most horrifying example is when it comes to decide the color of the walls, as we use to put it, which means no influence at all, it is just illusionary democracy and where you know, youth councils and other types of youth influence are used as a decoration or PR (..) (YN2)

For example I talked to a girl who is active in a youth council in Norberg, who told me that she had tried to make out a dialogue with the municipality via the youth council, and invited and invited, but nobody showed up. She sent a great invitation and wrote that "I will serve tacos, please show up", you know, but none came. She went out and stood outside the hall of the city council and you know, waited until they came out and asked "why don't you come when I want to meet you? I served tacos.". And then there was, according to her, one of the commissioners that said "no, we will not come if we don't get paid". (YN1)



There is also possible to apply a third layer, a structural one which accounts for variations in the group of youths:

I think we have a quite conformed society, you shall be quite a lot in a specific way or at least really similar to that way. So it is.. It is a bit wishy-washy to say so, but you use to talk about white middle-aged men and if you are a white middle-aged women you are just a tad worse or how to say, and the there is some kind of declining scale down to those disabled children. It is even more difficult if you are a foreigner too, it is more or less that way and you have troubles to get there, you have troubles to raise your own voice, that how it is. (YL3)

This connects to another problem; the society's problem with youths or policy implementation. To reach the group of target. The policies adapted tends to engage those who are already organized, but fails to reach those who need it most, a challenge and paradox.

Far away from everyone is engaged in a political youth organization or even other youth organizations, so you have to bear it with you that some perspectives.. but these youths are not engaged at all what.. Yeah, then you have to go out in the city and ask and yeah.. (PN2)

Absolutely, but to be honest, the youths we reach is probably those who are already committed (..) (OL1)

Another problem is the inter-sectorial character of the youth policy, which means that the youth issues have to be taken into account in almost all policy areas.

It is a too diffuse group, it is heterogenic, it has become.. and maybe the biggest problem among youths is that there are some who do not need policies at all, or youth politics at all, because they are doing well, and there are groups who need very much politics to make it out and establish and become active citizens and such, so it.. I think that because that the group is so diversified and heterogenic have contributed to a no common.. there are no common direction for the group. (ON2)

The extracts turn back to the *why question* of the youth policy, *why* it is important and it ends up in terms of *rights*. Youths have different resources and qualifications, but the same rights. Some need a lot of support due to various factors, either natural or social, and the aim is to create equal opportunities to all of them.



Theme 5: Solutions

5.1 Youth issues

Education is probably the most common mentioned tool to solve the problem of young people. The school plays a central role and foreground both to provide knowledges but also to foster the young people.

No, I am a boring pragmatist, to me, what is most important to me is to find methods which make our youths complete school, indeed it is. Of course it includes an education which allows young people to have an influence and such, but most important is that it [the education] works. (PL1)

Another important strain is *culture* and of course *sports*, where giving access to cultural expression and/or sport activities are perceived to strengthening the individual coping abilities and self-esteem, but also bringing youths with different backgrounds together.

Yes, but I think for example.. yes, if you set out from the Committee of Culture it is of course, to me.. the access to culture even in lower ages in school is a tool to prevent.. that you get an interest in music, yeah, a culture interest in young ages which helps when the school gets stressful, which helps to and stimulates and motivates, is super important I think (..) (PN2)

Related to these broad solutions areas, there are an abundance projects aiming at strengthening the confidence among youths and to provide them with meaningful activities. This solution calls for innovation and hence the respondents put a lot of value in the work of the civil society and the municipalities.

(..) to trust the organization of the civil society and not try to steer it that much, you know, take the folk schools for examples, it is free and voluntary, the civil society are.. We are steering in.. It is not the case that we are telling them.. Are saying that “you shall now do exactly what we say, it shall be this way”, but we are giving them money and the mandate and a goal with the money and then they deliver whatever they deliver, I think it is really.. and it makes it really good (..) (ON2)

One example of such project set out by one of the respondents is ‘Ung peng’ (youth money), where the youths are able to apply for money to make out their own culture project. The project is set out at the regional level, and besides the learning process, whereas the youths learn to conduct their own project and work with an own budget, it also aims to engage the municipalities in the region.

(..) we have had four municipalities which have been in before, but one central point is to attract the municipalities so they have to have some kind of case officer, some contact person in each municipality who work with youth issues, it is almost the central point with it. (OL1)



Another project aims to make the youths choose the right educational program in upper secondary school and further there are efforts taken by the National Youth Council to provide knowledge and educate youth organizations and help them to work.

5.2 Policy issues

One of the most prominent requests is to define the youth policy even further, to clear out the responsibility to create a more coherent policy work, both at the EU level but also at the local and regional ones.

(..) as I said it is the county or regional level which is in general most uninteresting to us, to all. But we can see that it is often where it is missing a kind of strategy of how the youth policies shall be implemented. There are a youth politic and a youth strategy at the national level, many have either adopted the national or have wrote their own documents and structures of how they will work with youth influence at the local level, but it is generally missing a structure at the regional level (..) (YN2)

I think it would gain from a more defined.. a concentration if EU should.. Because it is of course an exchange, exchange.. what works in.. you know, best practice and such.. is really important and hence I am really cherishing the principle of subsidiarity and think that it is most, or pretty much are better done than.. within the area than, you know, some of the pillars or the formal work. (PL2)

(..) just because the importance of the municipalities and because there are a lot of changes in the municipalities, I think, you know, you should find some kind of order to make the municipalities work with these issues a bit more long-lasting and conscious. (ON1)

No, I really mean it. I do not think it is that way, but it should be, and they [the politicians] should have more issues up for discussion (OL2)

A related request is more education to gain a mutual understanding of the policy field. Why youth politics are important and what characterize the youths to make it more prioritized. The discussion tends to end up in costs, without an understanding of the profit of such a work.

You think that you do not have to say it 2015, but you need to very many times, you know that but yes, I think it is the one and may be only factor to success.. (PN1)

(..) we are trying to talk visionary about which society we want to live in. Now when the politicians are not talking that way, we are trying to push them in the direction where they might dare to be more visionary. (YN3)



But there are also an opposite demand to lower the bureaucracy and central steering, and instead dare to rely on the civil organizations.

(..) for example the agency network by MRCF, there is an agency fear of taking care of too much knowledge and expertise from the civil society.. Is it evidence based? Is it true? (YN1)

A related request is to hand over the power and responsibility to the youths themselves, to engage them and let them steer the direction of the youth policy to make it more suitable and effective.

I would say that one of the most important.. There are many important aspects, but one of the most important ones is to let the youths steer their own engagement, you know, to let the youths set the agenda, let the youths decide on their own which issues they want to.. You know, be involved in, because there are the youths themselves who know which issues they think are important. (YN2)

(..) all have been a youth sometime, so we all know what it means. But there are maybe youths who are living in it right now. I would perhaps not feel super comfortable to work with children's issues because it is not mine.. I do not live in it right now. I think that you have to engage those people who are affected and they should also be the representatives. (PL2/YL2)

The solutions may sound conflicting, is it possible to decrease the central steering but also clear out and define the responsibility? There are definitely a challenge, but also an opportunity to try to merge these solutions. The variety and complexity of the policy area calls for innovation and context settled solutions as well as subtle coordination.



Theme 6: Responsible Actors

A complex web of actor appears in the description of the respondents, and it is difficult to point out one responsible actor for the policy area.

Yes, we have, besides the lawmakers we have.. We have an own agency for youths, it is discussable, shall we have it? Mmm. We have the Ombudsman for Children, we have, yeah.. We have municipalities, counties, student organizations, yes, and political youth affiliations.. (.) (PN2) "

The responsibility seems to be shared by governmental organizations at the national level, the civil society (where the umbrella organizations such as LSU and the National Youth Council plays an important role), and the municipalities which are seen as the most important ones to a successful policy implementation. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) is a gathering organ for the municipalities and regions, and hence plays an important role in the policy process.

The municipalities are an extremely important part. At the national level it is the Council of Culture which is our primary, our primary part but we also have this agency of culture analysis, it is a quite new agency. (OL1)

Absolutely, but they have the youth policy at their place, you know, to simplify it the youth policy are not at the.. the youth policy at the national level is encouraging and you know, a visionary youth policy. You decide that this is how we should work, but there are the municipalities which (*not hearable*) at the end have the finances and the mission to work with youth. (..) SKL is of course an extremely important friend, just because they are an interest group for municipalities and the counties, so. (ON1)

One prominent actor at the national level is The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), but also The National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (LSU) which serves as a unified voice of the youth organizations to the national policy makers. To have a separate youth agency is distinctive for Sweden, it has and is still questioned at times, even though it gains more and more legitimacy. What seems to be the most important role of the agency is to merge the civil society to the formal politics, to provide knowledge about current issues and support various projects, whilst LSU complements by its' connection to the civil society.

At the national level, we have pretty much contact with the Agency for Youth and Civil Society, they are both contacting us and wants us to take part in various projects and exchanges because they think we are an important actor when it comes to youth influence, how we are working at the local level (..) (YN2)



(..) I would not say that it is not on a continually basis, there are mainly LSU that we are in contact with because they are our voice to the youth organizations. (PN1)

Beyond the formal contacts there are multiple of informal networks aiming to exchange knowledge and ideas, both at the local/regional and national level. Networks which are both permanently and temporary.

Yes, but Örebro.. we have, you know, been pals, friends.. And then we have the 'mid-Sweden' network which have been important during.. (*not hearable*) And it have been important in periods, if we may say. Then it is as with everything else, we are reformed and we are reconstructed and if.. (OL2)

The Child and Youth Network, the agency network for child- and youth issues, which we started with BO [The Ombudsman for Children] and The Swedish Consumer Agency and yeah.. we were five to six agencies in the beginning, but now we are 25 [agencies] I think, there were very many. You know, it is quite extensive right now and there are some sub working teams too (..) (ON1)

Another, claimed to be, important actor in the policy formulating process is the youths themselves, either directly by electronic youth panels or by representative organizations such as LSU, to understand the problems and to find suitable solutions. Although the influence seems to be delimited to already set agendas and to low financed and non-conflicting issues.

It is probably when we are wondering something.. so it is pretty much.. I will.. to put my hand on the heart I will admit that it is on our initiative, when we are thinking that, now we are wondering a lot (..) (PL1)

You know, I think that, how it applies in general to youths, the fuzzier the issue is, the lesser money, lesser prestige, the easier it is to involve youths because then there are not that much to lose. But when it comes to big issues as for example, yes, but the new labor market policy where you always are talking about the youth unemployment, it is the biggest issue I would say, where we have not been in and given any inputs, but then we do not have much to say regarding the labor market policy either, because we are more interested in the youths' organization, you know, more general issues. But the bigger the political resist.. you know the bigger the conflicts, which there are in the labor market, housing market, in the politics.. it is big issues you know, the harder it is for the government to take this, the dialogue seriously. (YN1)



Theme 7: The Role of Young People

The role of young people is described in a diverse way. In some sense they are conceptualized as a group in need of various action, a group who lack knowledge and self-esteem which need support to not become estranged from the rest of society. But they are also described as active actors to both form and implement the youth policy.

I think there is a general, political agreement that the youths as a group, if you generalize, there is a value of.. you know, you perceive youths as a resource to use that bromo.. I think there is definitely a political agreement independent of political color or affiliation, I think nobody says that the youths are just a problem. I do not think that this attitude exist in the Swedish politics but is prominent in the European politics to compare, where you have a really problem focused..you know, to prevent criminality, drugs, that they drop out of school, you know everything is nego nego nego, and then they shall become adults and thereafter it is all good. It does not exist in the Swedish policy, there is a value of young people to reach their voice, to establish in the society and, yes, be an active person and citizen in the society we are creating. However, I am thinking that this perspective is dominating the Swedish policy. (ON1)

I would say that one of the most important.. There are many important aspects, but one of the most important ones is to let the youths steer their own engagement, you know, to let the youths set the agenda, let the youths decide on their own which issues they want to.. You know, be involved in, because there are the youths themselves who know which issues they think are important. (YN2)

(..) many of them is in need of self-esteem efforts, you know, have failed in school.. show them the way forward, but they have extremely bad experiences regarding the school, how shall you work..? (ON2)

But they are also to some extent seen as unknowing and unable to take responsibility due to their low age, even when turned 18 which is when you, in juridical terms, come of age in Sweden.

You have the opportunity to run office when you are 18, and there are members of the youth affiliation who have seats in committees, but it does not mean that you get the most attractive seats or even a permanent seat, you may get a stand-by seat, even if you have been in for a very long time. I have experienced that some people have got a committee seat, in a better committee, a bit more attractive, people who have been in and are older, maybe in their middle-ages, who has been a member of the party for two weeks, concurrently as there are youths who have been a member for two or three years, they got a stand-by seat in a less attractive committee. So age matters. (PL2/YL2)

This view is correspondingly illustrated in the policy practice, where the youth engagement is at risk to become theatre or just influential at non-important issues such as the decision of 'the color of the wall', as one respondent put it.



(..) the most horrifying example is when it comes to decide the color of the walls as we use to put it, which means no influence at all, it is just illusionary democracy and where you know, youth councils and other types of youth influence are used as a decoration or PR (..) (YN2)

So it is really hard, you know student councils and such are perceived as..: “yes, it is student democracy and bla bla bla”, but it is mainly theatre (..) (PL2/YL2)

Besides these perspectives, there are a third, interesting one explained by PN1, who connects the role of youths to the preservation of peace

(..) But, I think, as the situation is in Europe and the old thought of the EU-project as a project of peace which has been laying.. you know deep under.. and all just think.. but it has also been apparent to me, have become clear that, we need EU to continue cooperation and solve problems in cooperation, and to me I think that.. To most people, even to the minister of youth I know, it is a really heavy focus upon that part, we need to continue the cooperation to not.. to keep together, it was a time, I mean. (PN1)



Theme 8: A Comparison between the Written Documents and the Interviews

The policy documents and the interviews are overall congruent with some small divergences. Both the interviews and policy documents refer to the concept *youth* as people up to the age of 25. It is a huge focus upon *participation* and *establishment*, which in the interviews are translated into *inclusion*. Although mental illness is toned down in the interviews compared to the documents. One important feature found in the documents is the mainstreaming perspective, that the youth perspective shall be taken into account in the whole policy making process. This coincide with the trans-sectorial perspective described by the respondents. Other similarities is the emphasis upon the *rights* of young people and the recognition of youth as a *heterogenic* group, with the exception that the documents involve more varieties compared to the interviews (for example disabilities, which is excluded in the interviews), where some variation clearly is put in favor of others, although even the policy documents calls for special efforts to for example NEETs (people who are neither in education, employment or training) and long-term unemployed.

The *roles* of young people are also consistent, perceiving youth as both passive recipients as active actors to improve and change the society. Regarding *responsible actors* the interviews put more importance to the municipalities and the civil society than in the policy documents, which focus is mainly on the national level agencies such as the ministry, even if all actors are mentioned as well in the documents as in the interviews. A finding that may indicate the problem to steer the policy area and furthermore the dependency of a multiple actors inside as well as outside the public domain.

One perspective that is left out from the policy documents, but apparent in the interviews is the *bottom-up perspective*; the adults' failure and even unwillingness to include young people in the policy process. If the policy documents exclusive focus upon the problem of youth, the respondents provide an additional dimension – the problem of adults.



Theme 9: Reflections

The analysis proves that the youth policy of Sweden is multifaceted and crosses over almost all policy areas. The work is loosely organized and the respondents give examples of quite different interventions or projects of how to implement it. A question that both came up during the interviews but also the analyzing process are; do we really need a youth policy? Is there any use talking about a youth politics? Even though all respondents stress the importance of youth policy work in general, it seems to have different meanings depending of the target group, and the youths varies as much as the rest of the population, and when looking at the general perspective, do their needs differ as much from the rest of us?

Yes, but you know what, I use to say, you know I think the youths' own perspective is important, but it is always hitting me that the divergences are not that big as you may think they are, when you have been sitting down and reasoned for a while. You are expressing yourself a bit differently and sometimes you do not understand what the one or the other is saying. I am sometimes using words which youths think are very old fashioned and sometimes youths are using words that (*not hearable*) we do not understand each other. (PL1)

(..) to day it is, you know, yes "youth work", no, the youths shall be able to get a real work.
(PN2)

One other interesting finding is *who are the youth?* And the fact that disabled people is more or less excluded from the policy area. The *youths* are defined as those who are to become the normative citizens and disabled youths are exclude from the discussion and treated as a separate group, even though the respondents try to be inclusive it is prominent that the heterogenic group mainly consists of various social classes, ethnicity and gender. This is furthermore strengthening the risk of talking about youths as a group with common interest and challenges, hindering us from seeing the diversity of problems.