

# SETTING THE SCENE: 20 YEARS OF YEPP – HISTORICAL CONTEXT, KEY FEATURES AND MILESTONES

By Angelika Krüger

## 1. Historical Context and Spirit of the Time

Welcome to the Past! We start our journey in the 1980s/1990s to get an impression of the broader historical context and the spirit of the time which were the breeding ground for YEPP and formative for its conceptual design and development.

**In the 1980s/1990s, social exclusion** was recognised as **one of the most pressing challenges for modern societies**. Increasing numbers of **children and young people living in areas of social disadvantage across Europe** were **facing severe risks of social exclusion** - often compounded by **experiences of discrimination** because of ethnic and cultural background, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. A growing **sense of frustration** among young people became visible and, alarmingly, a growing number of young people were at risk of turning their back to democracy resulting in **increases of xenophobia, racism and violence**.

Early examples were the **protests and urban violence of young people in the banlieues of Paris and other cities in France since 1981**.

The relevance of these pressing challenges and the inherent risks for society were not recognized sufficiently. The impact of **traditional short-term approaches to fight social exclusion were limited** and needed to be reviewed and **more comprehensive and sustainable approaches** to be developed.

Against this background, **momentous events and changes in the 1980s and 1990s** opened up **new opportunities**, on the one hand, but **increased the risk of social exclusion of the most vulnerable** on the the other hand.

Major **political events** that happened were for example:

- The **collapse of communist/socialist regimes across central and eastern Europe**, which began in Poland and Hungary, is symbolised by the **Fall of the Berlin Wall** in

**November 1989** which led to the **Re-unification of Germany** in **October 1990** – exactly 30 years ago.

Truly remarkable was the **Peaceful Revolution by the citizens** that initiated the momentous change process. Courageous and determined East German citizens made their voices being heard through **continuous non-violent initiatives and mass demonstrations in East German Cities** as well as through their **mass exodus to the West** defying the authorities and **demanding democratic reforms**.

- **In December 1991**, the process of internal disintegration and growing unrest in various republics led to the **abolition of the Soviet Union** and to the **independence of the republics** including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.
- Around the same time, Europe was shocked by the **Balkan Wars** which resulted in the **break-up of Yugoslavia** and the **emergence of 6 independent states**: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.
- The **political map of Europe had changed substantially** and sparked the beginning of what would be a **New Era for Europe as a continent** and also for the **European Union**.

**Over the next decade upto 2011**, the **first European Union's eastern and largest round of Enlargement** took place when 13 states joined the EU: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, alongside Malta and Cyprus.

- **From the 1980s/1990s onwards**, the **political interest for youth** increased within the **European Union**. Young people were recognised as important **agents of shaping the future of the European Union**.

**Since 1983**, successive **Youth Programmes** were implemented **in favour and support of young people** - explicitly including **young people with fewer opportunities, youth workers and civil society organisations** in the Member States - from **first Pilot Projects** on „Transition from school to working and adult life“ (1983-87) to the

current **ERASMUS+ Programme** (2014-2020, continuation agreed), providing funding, for example,

- to promote **non-formal and lifelong learning, transnational exchanges and dialogue, mobility, understanding of the cultural diversity and the fundamental common values of Europe**,
- to encourage **young people's initiative, enterprise and creativity and to inspire active citizenship at local, national and European level**.

**Almost two decades later**, the **EU Youth Strategy** has been adopted as the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for **2019 – 2027** focusing on three core areas of action: **Engage, Connect, Empower**. This Strategy aims to **contribute to realising the vision of young people** which was formulated in **11 European Youth Goals** developed by young people from all over Europe during a dialogue process in 2017-2018.

The momentous events and changes have been reflected in the **spirit of the time** – the ***Zeitgeist*** - that influenced the work of many organisations and created a growing number of new initiatives.

On the one hand, there was the feeling of **joy almost euphoria, of freedom and independence**, expecting **unique opportunities to discover, explore and create new paths and structures**.

**„Civil Society as Democracy's Cornerstone“** and **„Young People as Drivers of Change“** dominated the spirit of the time reflecting the experience that **fundamental change had been possible through the powerful and peaceful civic engagement**, through the peaceful revolution of the citizens. Young people were recognised as active citizens and agents of change; **youth activism emerged**.

On the other hand, the **emerging challenges of the „new“ reality** were complex and daunting.

For many people the **breakdown of the familiar ‚old order‘** and **the confrontation with the new system and new sets of values**, with **different directions in their lives** had become

a **struggle with insecurity, uncertainty and unemployment** and an **increasing risk of marginalisation and exclusion**.

From the **New Era for Europe** emerged a spirit of:

- Open borders – Off to new destinations and horizons!
- New opportunities: mobility for work, studies and research
- Cross-border dialogue, exchanges and working together
- Experiences of similarities and differences and diversity
- New partners across the European Continent and broader experience and opportunities within EU Programmes.

In response to the momentous changes and rooted in the spirit of the time, the **interest in the changing Europe**, in the **democratic transformation process** and in the **role of children and youth gained momentum in Europe and world-wide**.

Many actors of the **non-governmental and philanthropic sector** committed to **providing funds and consultancy in support of Civil Society organisations and the transitional democratic processes** including **personal and societal democratic knowledge & attitudes to be lived in the local communities and at all levels of society**.

- **On the global level:** The **United Nations** adopted the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** in **1989** including the right to participate in decision-making.
- My own professional background was in community development and community education and in **1989** I established the non-governmental **Community Education Centre (CEC) in Germany** integrated with its international branch, the **European Regional Office of the International Community Education Association (ICEA)**, both funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. In its work the Centre focussed on **building a close cooperation with colleagues in East Berlin** as well as **in Hungary and other Eastern European countries**, including **joint projects on youth at risk** and the **emerging challenges for communities in Europe**.
- At the same time, several **international research projects and innovative youth and community development initiatives** were published:
  - Children and Youth at Risk and Coordinating Services (OECD)

- Youth Leadership for Development (Ford Foundation)
  - Positive Youth Development Approach – young people as potential protagonists rather than as welfare recipients (International Youth Foundation)
  - Best practice of creating concrete resources for youth activism in an community-development context, e.g. Asset-based community development.
- And, last but not least, the **world-wide Technological Modernisation** has taken place during those years with the **rapid change in communication and progressive use of the social media**.

All these developments were part of the breeding ground for YEPP but **one development played a significant role for us because it opened the opportunity to initiate YEPP:**

- **In 1989**, by coincidence on the day of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the **European Foundation Centre (EFC)** was established **focussing in its first activities on the dramatic transformation across Europe and the developments in Central, Eastern and South East European countries** aiming at **helping to build Civil Society**, including support for initiatives in the field of youth, education and training.
- The **Youth and Education Interest Group of the EFC** commissioned a **comparative Study on „Youth Funding and Youth Policies of foundations in Europe and the United States“** (1999/2000) which I co-authored.

## 2. Key Features and Milestones of YEPP

Inspired by the **results of this study**, I got the opportunity to join forces and to build a **unique international cross-sectoral long-term partnership** with a group of **10 Foundations from different European countries and the United States – including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and Compagnia di San Paolo** – a partnership with the **European Foundation Centre**, with **OECD** and with my own Institute, the **Institute for Community Education (ICE)** of the **International Academy for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology and**

**Economics at the Free University of Berlin (INA) hosted by the Network of European Foundations for Innovations.**

**This partnership has been the foundation on which we were able to develop and build YEPP.**

The partners committed to **pooling the collective resources** – both professional and financial - to **creating synergy** for developing, implementing and evaluating an **innovative multi-dimensional and sustainable approach to combat social exclusion not for young people and their communities but together with them.**

After a **preparatory phase in 2000**, our joint initiative resulted in establishing the

**Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) (2001 – 2011).**

In this 10 year Programme we developed the **Conceptual Framework**, the **YEPP Concept of Change and Methodology** and the **Evaluation Concepts** - the **Common Ground for our initiative and joint work at local and European level.**

**Rooted in the spirit of the time**, we shared the **Vision** of a just, equitable and sustainable inclusive society and we committed to the **Mission** to develop and sustain **empowerment and participatory processes** that **create an active civil society with young people and communities at risk of social exclusion** to bring about **sustainable socially just changes in their communities and to contribute to building inclusive & resilient communities and an inclusive Europe.**

We committed to the **Empowerment Approach** because it is a **holistic approach** focussing on **every aspect of peoples' lives** that can address the **complexity of social exclusion processes** and can facilitate **action to overcome social exclusion.**

The empowerment concept and approach is **based on the “Menschenbild”** that views **disadvantaged groups as potential actors for change**, which is driven by an inherent trust in people's strengths and on a **normative orientation towards principles of autonomy, social justice and democratic participation.**

**Power** is understood as the rights of access to and control over resources as well as of decisional and structural capacities. Power is the **power to decide, to shape, to change, the potential to transform.**

Empowerment stands for a **dynamic process** which results in the outcome of an **expansion both of individual and collective capacities and spheres of action.**

We approached **youth empowerment systematically interlinked with community empowerment.**

Considering the **European dimension** of the challenges and the resources as well as our mission to contribute to building an inclusive, social Europe, the **work at local level was integrated with activities at transnational level** facilitating meaningful cross-border exchanges and learning processes and raising awareness of the broader context of **citizenship within Europe.**

To achieve **sustainability of the changes**, finally mainstreaming participatory processes, empowerment was **integrated and fostered in local, regional, national and European policies and structures and in joint actions across boundaries.**

This required to build **cross-sectoral cooperation of the public, private and independent sectors at all levels.**

In dialogue with all YEPP stakeholder groups we have committed to **five Overall YEPP Goals:**

- youth empowerment
- community empowerment,
- partnership (cross-sectoral, cross-border)
- advocacy and
- learning.

Another key feature of YEPP is the set of **Common Guiding Principles** to **underpin the work of all stakeholders at all levels as a red thread through every aspect of the work**, including for example:

- Engage young people as drivers of change
- Establish local cross-sectoral partnerships for joint strategic planning
- Provide capacity building and non-formal learning

- Integrate local, regional, national and international dimensions
- Advocate for policy changes mainstreaming empowerment processes.

One of the **key conceptual elements of the YEPP Concept of Change** is the **Multi-Level Approach**. It integrates the work at local, regional, national and European/international level.

### **At Local Level**

**At the beginning of YEPP**, we started with **7 areas of social disadvantage – communities in 6 European countries** were designated YEPP Local Sites. **Towards the end** of the Programme, the YEPP Community Network included **18 YEPP Local Sites in 8 European countries**.

The designated **YEPP Local Sites** are characterised by their **specific situations, social and political systems and cultures, challenges and problems**, and are **affected in different ways by disadvantage and risks of exclusion**. From **rural Kristinestad** on the west coast of Finland to **urban, multi-cultural Antwerp North** in Belgium, to **post-war Tuzla Simin Han** in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to **urban Turin and villages in Piedmont and touristic towns in Liguria** in Italy, to **Dublin's North Inner City**, Ireland, to **villages and towns with Roma population in Eastern Slovakia**, to **urban Warsaw** in Poland, and to **Görlitz and Zgorzelec on the border** between Germany and Poland.

The **YEPP Local Teams** engage in the **YEPP Cycle of Change** – the **participatory strategic planning process** - applying the methodology in their specific local situation, social and political culture.

The **YEPP Cycle of Change** starts with motivated, engaged young people and other citizens and local stakeholders, e.g. representatives of Youth Associations, NGOs, Businesses, the Municipality getting **organized in cross-sectoral informal or formal local action groups**, the so called **“Local Support Groups”**.

They conduct a **Situation Analysis** with **needs assessment** and **resource mapping** and develop their **Local Operational Plan** with **local objectives** and **planned activities and projects**. Part of the Operational Plan is the **Monitoring and Evaluation Plan** that defines **indicators, outputs and outcomes** to assess progress.

The development and implementation of the **Operational Plan** is **monitored and evaluated** by the Local Support Group. Based on the **results**, the Operational Plan is reviewed, the Situation Analysis updated and the **next Cycle** is on its way.

**At regional and national level,** NGOs in support of the work have been established:

- **YEPP Italia** - a national association for supporting YEPP Local Sites and local Youth Associations in Italy; in 2019, YEPP Italia celebrated its 15th Anniversary;
- **Tuzla Community Foundation** – established in 2003 as the first foundation for the development of local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina aiming at supporting the development of civil society in the Tuzla area.

**At international level,** the YEPP Local Sites form together with the international partner organizations the **YEPP Community Network**.

**In response to the needs and interests** of its members and **in support of the local empowerment and change processes**, the YEPP Community Network provides a **lively, inspiring and capacity-building international platform** for sharing expertise and experiences, challenges and concerns; for learning and supporting; showcasing and recognizing examples of best practices; joint initiatives and projects; for the opportunity to experience diversity and commonality. It has been coordinated by the **International YEPP Team**. We held, for example, 5 international **YEPP Community Conferences and Youth Meetings** in Berlin, Germany (2005), Turin, Italy (2006), Dublin, Ireland (2008), Genoa, Italy (2010) and Görlitz/Zgorzelec (Germany/Poland) /2011) funded by the Foundation Partners;. We facilitated a number of **trans-national and local workshops, training courses, meetings with politicians, bi-lateral site visits** and **twinning arrangements** as well as **European Youth Exchanges**, organised by **YEPP EmpowerMediaNetwork** and funded by the **EU Youth Programmes**.

**In October 2011, we celebrated 10 Years of YEPP and the end of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme** at the final YEPP Community Conference and Youth Meeting in Görlitz/Zgorzelec Germany/Poland.

The **results of the external evaluation**, carried out by Peter Evans and his team from **OECD/CERI**, and of the **internal participatory monitoring and evaluation** in the responsibility of the **YEPP Local Teams and the International YEPP Programme Team** indicated **significant achievements of YEPP** and summarized that **YEPP works if it is well implemented**. There has been **plenty of evidence** to indicate that **lasting changes took place in the YEPP Local Sites, some of which would not have taken place without YEPP**.

**In 2012, Peter Evans and I published the results of the internal and external evaluations – an up-to-date account of the first decade of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme** - in our book, titled: **„Youth and Community Empowerment in Europe – International perspectives“**, published by Policy Press of the Bristol University, UK.

We had commissioned a **specific evaluation report** on **„Partnerships as a key Concept of YEPP. Achievements and Lessons Learnt“** which was presented by Sanin Hasibovic also in 2012.

**Towards the end of the Programme, local and international stakeholders of the YEPP Community** worked together in a **broad and participatory consultation process** to develop a **plan for the future of YEPP post 2011**.

Based on their experiences over the 10 years and on the results of the evaluation, the **majority of all YEPP stakeholder groups** wanted to **continue the work in the Local Sites based on the YEPP approach and methodology** as well as **at international level and to expand the Network**.

To support the continuation of YEPP, we decided together to establish the **YEPP International Resource Centre (IRC) – now: YEPP EUROPE** - as a **Support Agency for Youth and Community Empowerment across Europe** at the **Institute for Community Education (ICE) of the International Academy Berlin (INA)** in **January 2012**.