Structure of Decision-making

A debate on official youth representation at central level has been conducted since the onset of the political transformation in Poland (i.e. The Polish Round Table Agreement; 1989). However, up till now no permanent and single authority representing young people’s interests has been created. Work is currently in progress to create an entity whose activity may contribute to the development of Polish youth policy.

It is difficult to pinpoint one central level authority responsible for making decisions relating to youth. At present, decisions on the implementation of individual public policies remain a responsibility of government administration (e.g. the Minister of National Education [1] is responsible for education and upbringing the Minister of Sport and Tourism [2] - for physical culture the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy [3] - for social policy and the Minister of Science and Higher Education [4] - for higher education and research. In 2008 initial declarations regarding the appointment of a Youth Plenipotentiary were submitted to the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland, however, no such plenipotentiary has been appointed yet (Raczek, 2014). It should be noted that the Ministry of National Education has most frequently been indicated as the central authority that supports structures representing youth.

Local government bodies operating at provincial, district and communal levels have all been assigned public tasks; some of which focus on young people. Communal governments are responsible for such matters as healthcare, social services, public education, culture and physical culture (Chmielnicki, 2009). Therefore, communes are responsible for the functioning of nurseries, primary schools, for supporting sports clubs, developing cultural activities, running libraries and supporting families in precarious life situations. Tasks assigned to districts and provinces are supra-communal and do not
It should be noted that the development of Poland’s youth policy occurs at regional level. Eleven provinces have established formal structures supporting and representing young people, such as The Youth Parliament of Lubelskie Province (Parlament Dzieci i Młodzieży Województwa Lubelskiego [6], established in 1996), The Youth Council of Zachodniopomorskie Province (Rada Młodzieży Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego [7], established in 2005), The Youth Parliament of Dolnośląskie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Dolnośląskiego [8]) (established in 2013), The Youth Parliament of Podlaskie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Podlaskiego [9], established in 2014), The Youth Council of Pomorskie Province (Młodzieżowa Rada Województwa Pomorskiego [10], established in 2015) The Youth Forum of Opolskie Province (Forum Młodych Województwa Opolskiego [11], established in 2017), The Youth Parliament of Wielkopolskie Province (Sejmik Młodzieży Województwa Wielkopolskiego [12], established in 2017), The Youth Parliament of Śląskie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Śląskiego, [13] established in 2017), The Youth Parliament of Świętokrzyskie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Świętokrzyskiego, [14] established in 2018). Youth Parliament of Mazowieckie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Mazowieckiego [15], established in 2019), Youth Parliament of Podkarpackie Province (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Podkarpackiego [16], established in 2019). In the Łódzkie Province work is underway on the establishment of Youth Parliament of Łódzkie Province [17]. Youth representations operating at regional level have various legitimacies, the most frequent form being a province marshal’s consultation body. Also non-governmental organisations are involved in the activity of formal youth representations, and in the remaining provinces - units from individual offices [18] (for example in Pomorskie and Opolskie provinces).

Examples of youth representations at regional level:

- Among other things, the objective of the Youth Council of Zachodniopomorskie Province [19] consists in the promotion of local and regional governance and in ensuring youth participation in the development of civil society. The Council's technical and administrative support is provided by the Secretariat for the Youth of Zachodniopomorskie Province (Sekretariat ds. Młodzieży Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego). The Council supports the activity [20] of youth councils in towns and communes, youth organisations and student governments.

- The Youth Parliament of Dolnośląskie Province was established in 2013. Its main goal is to represent the interests of young people in the province authorities, drafting opinions and action plans for local government bodies and staying in contact with young people from the region.

- Among other things, the Youth Ombudsman operating under the authority of the Office of the Marshal of Świętokrzyskie Province is responsible for intermediary activities between the youth community and the Office of the Marshal, promoting positive examples of youth activity in the region and of positive work performed for young people by various institutions, stimulation of cooperation and for the networking of organisations and youth groups in the region, as well as for initiating and supporting systematic solutions at regional level which boost young people’s social participation. In their publication entitled “Świętokrzyskie Province for Youth. Directions in supporting the social engagement of the youth of Świętokrzyskie Province 2017-2020” (Świętokrzyskie dla młodych. Kierunki wspierania aktywności społecznej młodzieży województwa świętokrzyskiego na lata 2017-2020), the authorities of Świętokrzyskie Province analysed the situation of young people in the region and activities undertaken to increase the
social engagement of youth.

Under Article 5 (b) of the Local Government Act, local government authorities may appoint a youth council as its advisory body. “Boosting young people’s interest and involvement in public affairs at local level is the most important objective of communal youth councils” (Owczarek, 2013). Moreover, communal youth councils facilitate young people’s participation in the process of making decisions affecting their peers. The establishment of consultation bodies such as commune councils is left to local government authorities. Youth councils have their statutes which describe the way in which they operate and how council members are selected. In 2007, the operation of 224 youth councils was confirmed, most of them were active in Dolnośląskie, Śląskie and Wielkopolskie Provinces. A report prepared by the Children and Youth Council operating by the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Poland states that in 2017 in 2478 communes a number of 408 youth councils were active, however in 2018 (as of 30th of April 2018) - 423.

The Alliance of Independent Youth Organisations (Porozumienie Niezależnych Organizacji Młodzieżowych) established in 1989 marked the beginning of attempts aimed at creating a national youth representation. The beginning of the 90’s witnessed the birth of the Polish Youth Council (Polska Rada Młodzieży) which was an advisory body to the government and then to the Minister of National Education. The Council ceased to exist in 1998 and was removed from the European Youth Forum. In 2002, the Ministry of National Education made an attempt to establish a nationwide representation of young people which would officially replace the then already inactive Alliance of Independent Youth Organisations, the Polish Youth Council and the Polish Youth Forum. The following year saw the establishment of the Association Polish Youth Council (Stowarzyszenie Polska Rada Młodzieży). In 2010 consultations were held concerning the appointment of a new Polish Youth Council, which was to be “a union of associations bringing together young people to represent them in the country and abroad and act for them”.

Regulation 40 of the Minister of National Education dated 21 December 2010 was the legal basis for the establishment of the Department of Youth and Non-governmental Organisations (Departament Młodzieży i Organizacji Pozarządowych). Among other things, it was responsible for the implementation of rules resulting from youth-related programme documents, including the State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012, cooperation with youth organisations and non-governmental organisations active in the field of education and upbringing, coordination of activities in the scope of youth information including the EURODESK15 and PLOTEUS II16 programmes, cooperation with the Public Benefit Activities Council (Rada Działalności Pożytku Publicznego), cooperation with the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji) and substantive supervision on the implementation of the “Youth in Action” programme in Poland. When the Department of Youth and Non Governmental Organisations ceased to exist on 28 February 2012, no new unit responsible for youth affairs was established in Poland (Raczek, 2014).

In 2016, the Minister of National Education appointed the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland (Rada Dzieci i Młodzieży Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education. The Council is an advisory body. Its tasks include “expressing opinions and presenting children- and youth-related proposals in the scope of matters remaining within the remit of the education and upbringing area of the government” [30]. The term of the council is one year. The Council is composed of 16 members and their substitutes (16) who are appointed by the Minister of National Education. Members and their substitutes represent particular provinces. The pupils and students between 13 and 20 years old who fulfill a number of criteria (for example engagement in volunteering activities, active attituded in the local community, good grades) can become members of the Council. The fourth term of Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland begun on 15th October 2019.
On 7th October 2019 the first term of The Dialogue Council with the Young Generation has begun (Rada Dialogu z Młodym Pokoleniem), which is an opinion-making and advisory body of the Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee (Przewodniczący Komitetu ds. Pożytku Publicznego). The Council is composed of 35 representatives, including 24 representatives of youth non-governmental organization, youth councils and The Student Parliament and 11 representatives of public institutions. In the article 411 of the Public Benefit Activities and Voluntary Service Act (Ustawa o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie) are defined competence of the Council, which include i.a. expressing opinions on legal acts concerning the young generation, creating a forum for dialogue between various public bodies and non-governmental organization and youth, supporting civil dialogue with children and youth. The term of the Council is two years.

The Union of Associations Polish Council of Youth Organisations (Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Rady Organizacji Młodzieżowych (PROM)) set up in 2011 and bringing together 39 member organisations is the only youth representation still active. The Union represents over 250 000 young people. The Union aims to participate in youth policy making, disseminate the idea of youth participation in public life, inform public opinion about the situation of young people in Poland, support the development of Polish youth organisations and of those which bring young people together. Among the entities that the Union cooperates with are the Public Benefit Activities Council and the Visegrad Group. Since 22 April 2017 the Union is a full member of the European Youth Forum which means that “with the remaining 102 Forum member organisations it will exert direct influence on the development of European youth policy”. In April 2017 the Union adopted its position on the matter of youth participation in social and political life. The Union addressed five areas - support provided to youth organisations, policy makers’ readiness to share initiatives with young people, transparency in determining young people’s abilities and potential influence in decisions, facilitating young people’s access to information as well as long-term thinking building on existing structures and youth organisations. Moreover, the Union presented its position on the consultation of the project entitled Youth Joined in Action Programme for 2016-2019 (Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019) (2016), amendments to the programme “Flats for Young People” (Mieszkanie dla Młodych) (2015) and amendments to the Associations Act (ustawa Prawo o stowarzyszeniach) (2014). The Union is cooperating also with the Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils Operating within Local Government Units (Parlamentarny Zespoł ds. wspierania młodzieżowych rad przy jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego). As the Union brings together only selected youth organisations, it is not regarded as an entity which fully represents the entire youth community.

Bodies dealing with youth matters are present at various levels of administration. The Education, Science and Youth Committee (Komisja Edukacji, Nauki i Młodzieży), composed of 39 deputies, operates within the Parliament of the Republic of Poland. The Committee deals with matters relating to “preschool, primary school, comprehensive secondary school, vocational, post-graduate and higher education (...), leisure, physical culture and sport for children and youth, care of children and youth (...), scientific cooperation abroad, pupil and student governments (...) fulfilling the aspirations of the young generation and to young people’s social and occupational adaptation”. There is a standing youth subcommittee composed of 11 deputies (at the end of the term 2015-2019) and working within the Committee.

29 April 2016 marked the appointment of the Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils Operating within Local Government Units (Parlamentarny Zespół ds. wspierania młodzieżowych rad przy jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego), which aims at providing support and advice to youth councils, integrating communities linked to youth councils and promoting the idea of active citizenship through participation in the work of youth councils. The Group is composed of 20 deputees. In 2016-2019 the Group cooperated with the Polish Council of Youth Organisations and with
the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland.

Students’ interests at central level are represented by the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland (Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), which is appointed on the strength of the Higher Education Act. This Parliament has the right to express opinions and present motions in matters relating to students, and give opinion on student-related normative acts (Act on Higher Education of 2005). It also organises training and workshops raising students’ qualifications, supports student projects, inspires international student exchange and participation in the international student movement. The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland brings together the student governments of all Polish higher education institutions.

Among the advisory groups that work for the Minister of Science and Higher Education is the Young Scientists’ Council (Rada Młodych Naukowców), whose tasks include the identification of barriers to development and supporting young scientists’ careers, initiation of young scientists’ contact with representatives of economic circles, and preparation of opinions and recommendations regarding the science and innovation policy of the country. Due to its specific character, the Council represents the interests of young scientists whose age equals the upper age limit for the youth age group.

1 October 2017 witnessed the launch of the National Agency for Academic Exchange (Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej - NAWA) which supports academic exchange and the internationalisation of higher education and science. NAWA disseminates information relating to the Polish education system and promote the Polish language abroad. NAWA will be able to award funds to students, doctoral students and employees of higher education institutions or institutes. In the future, the NAWA can also become EU and local governments' funds operator. NAWA’s budget will amount to about PLN 138 000 000.

Main Themes

As there is no specific youth-related act and no national youth strategy, no document determining the development of youth policy can be indicated. Activities undertaken on behalf of young people by the central government, national authorities and local government authorities are specified in legislation and presented in strategies adopted by the government.

In February 2013 the Council of Ministers adopted the “Long-term National Development Strategy, Poland 2030. The Third Wave of Modernity” (Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju. Polska 2030. Trzecia Fala Nowoczesności). This strategy, as part of Strategic Objective 3 [which aims to improve the accessibility and quality of education at all stages and increase the competitiveness of science] raises issues relating to the education of children and young people and to the necessity of adapting the education system to changing social and economic needs in order to facilitate transfer from education to the labour market.

The “Responsible Development Strategy” (Strategy) published in 2017 by the Ministry of Development updates the “Country Development Strategy 2020” - a mid-term country development strategy adopted by a resolution of the Council of Ministers on 25 September 2012. The document presents the strategic tasks of the country and contains recommendations for public policies. The Strategy is “the basis for changes to the development management system, as well as to existing strategy papers (strategies, policies, programmes) and for the verification of other implementing instruments”. The
main objective of the Strategy consists in “creating conditions for facilitating the rise of income levels of Polish inhabitants while increasing social, economic, environmental and territorial cohesion”, as well as in specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1: Sustained economic growth increasingly based on knowledge, data and organisational excellence,
- Specific objective 2: Community-sensitive and territorially-balanced development,
- Specific objective 3: An effective state and institutions which are dedicated to growth as well as social and economic inclusion

The EU youth strategy indicates seven areas which are reflected in national strategies and programmes directly or indirectly relating to young people. The individual objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and tasks (e.g.: governmental programmes and strategic projects) which are likely to contribute to their implementation are presented below:

- Education and training: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Employment & entrepreneurship, e.g. Guaranee for Youth [53] (Gwarancje dla Młodzieży) (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy), Active Forms of Preventing Social Exclusion - the new dimension 2020 [54] (Aktywne Formy Przeciwdziałania Wykluczeniu Społecznemu - nowy wymiar 2020 (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Health & well-being, e.g. Programme Club (Klub) (Ministry of Sport), Programme Academic Sport (Sport Akademicki) [55], Programme School Sports Club (Szkolny Klub Sportowy [56])
- Participation: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Voluntary activities: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Youth & the world, e.g. Programme Mobility Plus [57] (Mobilność Plus) (Ministry of Science and Higher Education),
- Creativity & culture, e.g. The National Readership Development Programme [58] (Narodowy Program Rozwoju Czytelnictwa) (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage).

The choice of a specific target group is based, among other things, on the results of research and diagnoses presented in a given Strategy, programme or strategic project.

The National Agency for Youth

The National Agency for Youth, which is responsible for youth policy at a central level, does not operate in Poland. Youth-oriented tasks are carried out by the central government as well as national and local government authorities in accordance with their competences.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

It is difficult to clearly identify the way in which activities relating to youth policy are monitored and evaluated as there are no relevant documents and reports and no state-run centre dealing with youth-related research. A youth act and/or a national youth strategy would probably contribute to setting out the directions of the development of Polish youth policy which would then be systematically evaluated.