

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

I. Introduction

This methodology is developed in the frameworks of the project REGION OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION, reference number CB007.2.22.028, funded by Interreg – IPA CBC Bulgaria – Serbia Programme.

The PROJECT OBJECTIVES are:

- Promotion of young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society through joint creation of an effective model of student parliament, based on best practices of both countries and abroad, preparation of human resources, technical support and networking.
- Awareness raising about youth problems and youth potential by implementation of cross-border youth network initiatives, generated and designed by students parliaments and jointly implemented.
- Creation of a cross-border network of students parliaments in the whole border region.

The project supports creation of long term conditions for cooperation initiatives of young people, through capacity building in field of youth self-government at schools. It makes this also in cooperation, answering of concrete needs of young people and their structures in the target border regions.

II. Description of Research of Student Self-governance in Bulgarian-Serbian Border Region (as per project proposal)

The main aim of this activity is an overview of current situation and needs in field of student self-governance. The research will also support process of promotion of the project idea among target groups and educational institutions, it will identify best practices and potential beneficiaries for further participation.

The research will be done practically in whole Bulgarian-Serbian border region (all 6 eligible districts in Bulgaria and 6 in Serbia - Bor, Zaječar, Nišava, Pirot, Pčinja and Toplica) by joint research team, using common methodology, developed by an experienced research leader. Concrete cities/towns will be selected according the methodology of research. The target respondents can be members of school parliaments, other students, school management and staff members.

The whole process of research will require on-line collaboration between both sides. The final report will be presented during the First international meeting of experts. Its conclusions will be used for creation a common Methodology for Student Self-governance, based on real needs.

LP - Free Youth Centre will organize and implement this activity in Bulgarian border area and will be responsible for methodology of whole research, in both countries. It will provide one researcher and the research leader. PP2 – Open club will organize and implement the activity in Serbian border area, using own researcher.



Methods: The research will combine desk research (of laws, strategies, publications, etc.) and field work in selected cities/towns. The methodology of research will be elaborated by research leader. Methods of work can be: survey by questionnaires and structured interviews, focus groups, overview of documents, publications and statistics, case studies, etc. Every researcher will visit min. 6 cities/towns. The final report (~50 pages) will be translated and will be accessible in Bulgarian and Serbian languages on the project web-site.

Resources: One experienced research leader will be responsible for methodology and implementation of whole research. He/she will be supported by one researcher in Bulgaria and one in Serbia. The project budget will cover their honoraria, travel (up to 860 km) and subsistence cost during their field work in border area, as well as translation service for the research report and other relevant documents.

The main output of the activity will be a report-analyses about current situation and identified needs in the border region in field of student self-governance and youth activism, which include:

- Description of national regulatory base and policy;
- Real practice – description, statistics and examples (e.g. case studies);
- Identified needs for further development, on the base of opinions of all important parts of school community.

III. Objectives of the Research

The main task of this methodology is to provide suitable tools for conducting theoretical analysis and empirical study of the current situation and possible needs in Bulgaria and Serbia (with a focus on the border area) in terms of youth self-government at school, including:

- Regulatory framework (policy papers on national level: laws, strategies, action plans, regulations on school level, etc.);
- Youth structures (school parliaments, students councils, etc.) – their real contribution in school life and in development of youth leadership, their achievements and challenges, methodical provision, best practices (projects, initiatives), other needs, etc.

The products of the research should be production of two report-analyses (one for Bulgaria and other for Serbia), but both based on common methodology, structure and tools, which will guarantee comparability of the results.

Additionally, the methodology should take into account European standards and indicators of youth policy, applicable and designed according the context of the project), namely:

- Commitment to the development of youth leadership and self-government - To what extent does the state, the education system and educational institutions set the development of youth leadership (including student self-government) as a goal. This should be stated in strategic and other regulatory documents. The development of leadership and self-government must also be reflected in some way in the planning of the educational process at school. It is expected that there will be coordination and complementarity between national and school-level objectives.



- **Legislation** - The functioning of the student body should be based on clear rules and regulations, including its authority and role in school life. The status can be determined at school level, but on the basis of a legal framework. It is important that young delegates also have real involvement in this process.
- **Youth Studies** - The development of youth leadership and self-government in school should be based on some research and analysis, both national and at school level. At the same time, it is also important to have constant feedback from the members of the student councils and the students themselves. Research results and feedback should be taken into account in future planning.
- **Democracy and participation** - How clear procedures and rules, as well as established practices, exist for the democratic election of members of student councils and parliaments. These rules and practices should be universal and not restrictive to certain categories of students. Everyone should be free to participate and to apply for membership of self-governing structures. The school, on its part, needs to encourage participation as well as to strive for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities (e.g. minorities, disabled people) in the selection process.
- **Youth Self-Government Resources** - What resources are allocated to the educational system for development of student self-government, including financial, material and methodological? The Student Council or Parliament could have its own budget to manage. Who are the people and structures in the school that support it and how?
- **Youth training policy** - young leaders must be prepared for the tasks they will perform. Unlike adults, their organizational and any other experience is limited, which makes their education an important prerequisite for the effective functioning of student self-government bodies. Appropriate curricula must be developed for this purpose.
- **Youth workers** - These are the people who directly support the activities of youth councils and parliaments. The qualifications and experience of these professionals at school should be adequate to their role. It is also important that this qualification is maintained and enhanced in view of the dynamics in dealing with young people, which must be an element of public (including school) policy.
- **Development of volunteering** - As a leadership structure, the student council or parliament is expected to initiate and implement various initiatives, involving the participation of other students. In other words, it should contribute to the development of youth volunteering at school level.
- **Advisory functions (access to decision-making)** - As a self-governing body, the student council or parliament has also the function to make decisions that are expected to have an impact at school level. They should be consultative and have a mandate to influence the decisions of school management bodies - such as pedagogical councils and the headmaster himself. This feature should be not only regimented, but also actually working.
- **Dissemination of good practices, partnerships and networking** - Young people are compensated for their smaller life experiences by their creativity and innovation. Different schools are generating different ideas, some of which could set a good example and attract more participation. Are there any practices for cooperation between self-government structures in different schools within the city, region and country? To what extent are students bodies involved in projects at European level?



The research must also promote project idea and identify best practices and potential beneficiaries for further participation.

IV. Basic principles of the study

The basic principles we will follow when conducting the survey include:

Principle 1 - Objectivity

Well-formulated questions are the basis for an objective and clear assessment. They must require specific, measurable, qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative indicators will, where possible, be prioritized if reliable and verifiable sources of information are available. Objectivity also involves reducing subjectivity when interviewing or interviewing survey respondents to avoid the so-called. "Social desirability" in the answers.

Principle 2 - Extent or representativeness

One way to provide it with limited time and resources is to select the most relevant sources of information, including all stakeholders - people and institutions.

Principle 3 - Access to information sources

Here we mean that the study must take into account the real possibilities of access to information in an educational institution without setting impossible or very difficult to achieve goals against the background of existing constraints, both from the environment and from the limitations of the project.

Principle 4 - Outcome orientation

This means that the study should focus on collecting information that directly serves the analysis process - finding the status and making recommendations to educational authorities.

Principle 5 - Partnership with the school community and other stakeholders

Principle 6 - Use modern and flexible means of gathering information.

For example, the use of ICT where possible and can objectify or facilitate the conduct of the study or its component.

V. Subject of Theoretical Study (desk research)

The subject of theoretical study are public policies aimed to student self-governance and development of youth leadership at school - documents, such as regulations, analyzes, policies, strategies, plans, programs relating to this issues, insofar as such exists on national and school levels (the last concern only the eligible area of the project). Due to the fact that the study covers the state of young self-government at the moment, the reports and analyzes about youth leadership and participation in decision making at school of public authorities or independent bodies/experts should be explored.

Researchers should explore the available public documents that are most often available on the websites of the respective institutions. If this is not so, documents can be requested under the



Access to Information act. In this connection, we recommend to notify about the project and its targets/activities key institutions, including responsible Ministries of education and their territorial bodies. It is also useful to enter into contact with the national, regional and local unions or umbrella organizations of student councils/parliaments, if such exists.

VI. Subject and Target Respondents of Empirical Study

The subject of empirical research is focused more on the practical implementation of student self-government at school level (high-schools from the target region) - what are the specific practices, deficits and needs.

Target respondents of the survey can be representatives of:

- School management;
- Youth workers (specialists from school staff, who are directly responsible for organization and work of student councils/parliaments – e.g. school psychologists, pedagogues, pedagogic advisers, teachers, etc., depending of concrete school);
- Students – members of student parliaments/councils;
- Students – not members of student parliaments/councils;
- Teachers and other school staff;
- Parents and parent’s bodies at school;
- Out of school experts (e.g. from umbrella organizations, educational authorities, etc.).

VII. Methods of Research

This study is divided into two parts - theoretical analysis and empirical study, which results will be summarized in the final reports. The purposes of this study provides use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods are questionnaires. They allow you to cover as a big part of the object of study. The qualitative methods will be conducting interviews and focus groups. They allow the intervention of the implementer and have an empirical character.

There are the following methods for carrying out the study within the project:

- Implementation of theoretical analyses

The theoretical analysis includes working with web-based information sources and documentary analysis. During the survey will be analyzed and referenced information from official websites of national, regional and local institutions, schools and student councils/parliaments from Bulgaria and Serbia; strategies, plans and policies related to youth self-government. It is expected from the study to use and present also results from national researches on this topic, if such exist, and available best practices. The projects and other implemented initiatives by various actors (schools, NGOs, etc.), which supporting development of student self-government, are also object of the study.

The theoretical analysis will be realized by the research leader in cooperation with research experts from Bulgaria and Serbia.

- Conducting of focus groups



In order to achieve effectively the objectives of the research, it is necessary to realize empirical study by conducting a minimum two focus groups - in different administrative districts involved in the project from Bulgaria and a minimum of two focus groups in Serbia selected in the same way. The aim is to identify best practices, deficits in youth policy and to assess the needs on the local or regional level. Target respondents in the focus groups are representatives of the above listed respondents. The groups can be mixed or specific (e.g. one of the focus group can be only of students). In this regard have been identified and proposed relevant topics that are included in the questionnaires for conducting of the focus groups. Each focus group consists of 8-10 respondents who should conduct a discussion on the topic. The small group allows a detailed presentation of the views of participants, more spontaneity and truthfulness of the allegations. The discussion is guided by a moderator who asks questions on the base of special instructions and scenario. Each participant should be given the opportunity to express themselves and each should express opinion on all questions. For each next focus group is admissible adaptation of the scenario and the questions that will be asked, according to the responses and results from the previous focus group. The questionnaire consists of at least 4 questions and a brief instruction for moderator. In particular, the holding of focus groups is comprise the steps of:

- Identification of participants - factor of selection is associated with the occupation/position of the participants and the institution/organization in which they work or belong - implemented by the research experts from Bulgaria and Serbia;
- Send invitations to participants in the focus groups. It would be better to send invitations at least 20 people for each group in order to ensure the participation of a minimum of 8 people. The invitation should give information about aims of the event, place and time of implementation. It is permissible participants to be invited to participate by phone - implemented by the research experts from Bulgaria and Serbia;
- Conducting focus groups by the research experts from Bulgaria and Serbia. It is desirable in the beginning the expert to present the project and the context of the study;
- Recording and analysis of the main assertions - implemented by the research experts from Bulgaria and Serbia;
- Provision of analysis/study results from the focus group to the leader of research team;
- Summary of results - realized with support of the leader of the research team.

The results of the focus groups will be SWOT analyses of school self-governance, used as a means to clarify the current situation in the region.

There will be two focus group organized in each country – one of youth workers and one of representatives of student self-government structures.

- Conducting individual interviews with target respondents

In difference of focus groups, which are seeking an overall picture of the specific location in terms of youth self-government at school, in the individual interview the focus is on particular school and individual experience of the respondent. For this reason, questions are selected depending on the profile of responders – educational authorities, youth workers and youth leaders. If the respondent has difficulties to answer, the interviewer proceeded to the next question. To achieve the desired efficiency should be conducted at least 32 interviews - 16 in Bulgaria (min. 2 per administrative district) and 16 in Serbia (under the same conditions).



Target respondents of interviews must be:

- Representatives of educational authorities – min. 4 respondents per country;
- Representatives of youth workers at school – min. 6 responders per country;
- Chairs of youth self-government structures – min. 6 responders per country.

The results of the survey through interviews will outline the real practice and concrete impacts of school leadership policies by actors, especially those who are primarily implementers of policies.

- Conducting research by questionnaires

The picture of the situation will be not complete without one of main objects of student self-governance – the student community. Here, it is important to explore things like motivation for participation, the real benefit of the school parliament, its impact on school life and its image among young people. The questionnaire will include both closed and open questions, but in a way that makes it easier to fill in. Target respondents can be reached on site (using hard copy of questionnaire) or through Internet, due to the fact that young people prefer to use web applications. Every country or researcher has right to select most appropriate way to do this research. To achieve the desired efficiency should be applied at least 100 questionnaires - 50 in Bulgaria (min. 6 per administrative district) and 50 in Serbia (under the same conditions). Target respondents must be:

- Teachers – min. 12 responders per country;
- Members of self-government structures – min. 18 responders per country;
- Students, nonmembers of self-government structures - min. 20 responders per country.

VIII. Target communities

With the intention of being more representative, we plan to include in the research both large cities (district centres) and smaller towns throughout whole project area.

Bulgaria: Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Botevgrad (Sofia district), Pernik and Kustendil

Serbia: ????

IX. Schedule of Research

Task	Number of people days	Responsible person/s	Period of implementation (Indicative)
1. Development Methodology of Research	5	Research leader	Not later than 20.07.2019
2. Development of research tools and instructions	3	Research leader	Not later than 31.07.2019
3. Desk research	Up to 10 per country	Researchers	Not later than 30.09.2019



4. Field work	Up to 12 per country	Researchers	
5. Processing of results and preparation of draft country reports	Up to 4 per country	Researchers	Not later than 05.10.2019
6. Methodical support of researchers	2	Research leader	01.08 – 05.10.2019
7. Deadline for production of the final version of reports and annexes		Research leader	14.10.2019

X. Structure of the Reports

1. Introduction – context of the research, tasks, etc. (made by research leader)
2. European Policy regarding youth leadership and self-governance at school (made by research leader)
3. National policy regarding youth leadership and self-governance at school – basic documents
4. Current situation of student self-government in the border area in terms of European standards and indicators for youth policy
 - Commitment to the development of youth leadership and self-government
 - Legislation and rules
 - Youth studies
 - Democracy and participation
 - Youth self-government resources
 - Youth training policy
 - Youth workers
 - Development of volunteering
 - Advisory functions (access to decision-making)
 - Dissemination of good practices, partnerships and networking
5. Conclusions and recommendations (optional) – identified deficits, needs and key questions, which can be useful for next activities under the project.
7. Annexes:
 - Regulations in field of student self-governance, examples of best practices/case studies, etc.



Annex 1

Instructions for interviews

Through individual interviews we aimed to gather the necessary information for the purposes of the study, which can not be collected (e.g. not available) otherwise, and to explore the individual experiences outside the official documents regarding the actual state of youth policy and youth activism, needs and best practices. The interviews will be conducted by a researcher, who carried out the dialogue on pre-prepared scenario - a questionnaire. The questions are open, which gives freedom of respondents. Respondents should understand that the study is voluntary and confidential. Timing should not take more than 30-40 minutes per respondent.

In particular, the interviews comprises the following steps:

- Drawing up a list of those willing to participate in interviews - implemented by the research experts from both countries;
- Conducting interviews - implemented by the research experts from both countries;
- Transcription of each interview, retrieval and analysis and synthesis of the main assertions - implemented by the research experts from both countries;
- Summary of results - realized from the head of the team of experts together with research experts from both countries.

Product of the research will be a report that will summarize the results of the desk research and field work.

[This publication was produced with the assistance of the European Union through the Interreg-IPA CBC Bulgaria-Serbia Programme, CCI No 2014TC16I5CB007. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Free Youth Centre association and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the Managing Authority of the Programme.](#)

