

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION. CASE STUDY: THE EVALUATION OF THE 'ROMANIA'S YOUTH CAPITAL' NATIONAL PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This paper is an invitation to the reader to rethink the role of the evaluator in our days. Should the evaluator be an expert that determines the success of an intervention based on an external view or may be even someone from the implementation team that can determine the value of his/hers own activity? My evaluation on the 'Romania's Youth Capital' National Programme is both an analysis of the results of the applied measures and an introductory training for the members of the management team on developing their own evaluation competences. The case study emphasizes the innovative process in which the role of the external evaluator is replaced by one that is an integrated part of the programme. By the empowerment component of the evaluation, this approach proved to be beneficial in the given case helping the initiators of the programme to acknowledge the status of their activities and the need of perspective for the future. It is expected this study to be a positive example of how to use the developmental evaluation and its outcomes.

Keywords

Developmental evaluation; NGO sector; youth policies

1.INTRODUCTION

In the youth sector the role of The European Union is rather to promote cooperation through a dialogue in which diversity is respected than to provide reinforced legislative instruments. Benefiting from the transfer of information and experiences that take place thanks to this platform, States can develop their own youth policies, in line with the needs of young people at national level. The latest European programmes reflect interest in investing in human capital and for smart and inclusive growth. The attention and resources of the European Union are increasingly moving on to young people, a social category that can and will determine how the future will look.

In this study, I propose to analyse the evolution of youth policies both at European level, as well at national level. The emphasis will be placed in the case study on the 'Youth Capital of Romania' initiative, which will be the subject of a development assessment. This innovative approach will allow to improve the evaluation capacity of the team implementing the Programme and the transmission of this capacity to project implementation teams within the programme. The conclusions will summarize the observations on the evolution of youth policies of the European Union and the lessons learnt in the evaluation process for new initiatives in the field of youth similar to the one evaluated.

1.1. Concepts and definitions

Defining the young is important because it has the consequence of activating certain rights such as voting, running for a public function, working, or obligations such as criminal liability. At the same time, this age limit may determine the age at which driving, the purchase and consumption of cigarettes and alcohol are allowed, but also the age at which a sexual act can be considered consented. These issues are essential to create relevant public policies for young people. There is the need to address special public policies for the young people because they represent a vulnerable group in our society, but also a key category considering the aging trend of the European population. In Romania, the Youth

Act No. 350/2006 regulates the conditions under which a person is framed as young: a citizen aged between 14 and 35 years of age.

The theoretical approach used is a mix between the traditional formative assessment based on theory and developmental evaluation. Developmental Evaluation is suitable for complex and dynamic realities such as the youth field. I proposed that the evaluation process be a strong customer-oriented one; Clients, represented by the governance of the programme, come from the NGO and private environment, are followers of innovation and social initiatives from the "Grass thread" and not imposed by policy makers. The complexity of the youth field is given by numerous factors. Firstly, the broad age range of the youth category includes generations with different needs, perhaps even contradict. Another element to be taken into account in shaping youth initiatives is the environment of provenance (economic, social, cultural, religious, educational, etc.). The aim of this assessment is to create the mechanisms by which the programme can evolve in the rhythm of the youth sector dynamics.

Focusing the strict assessment on methodology distracts the attention from studying the model about how the program should work. The theory-based evaluation paradigm was developed to distinguish the failure of a program/project from the point of view of the implementation of the failure caused by the erroneous construction of the intervention logic (Fitzpatrick and Sanders 2012, 161). In view of the fact that the programme is not at the completion stage but in progress, we have opted for a formative assessment. This constitutes a proactive assessment and guidance process on clarifying the objectives and implementation plans. The main quality of this type of evaluation is given by the contribution it can bring to the improvement of the programme (Stufflebeam and Coryn 2014, 173). The formative assessment focuses in particular on the criteria of relevance and effectiveness.

Relevance, in the context of an assessment, relates to the degree to which the objectives of the programme are appropriate in relation to the needs it addresses (Evalsed 2013, 34). Although the analysis of this criterion is ideal in the ex-ante evaluation phase, it can also be carried out at the intermediate stage to test the theoretical model of the programme and to allow its improvement. Identifying errors in the intervention logic is in support of reconfiguring the program to

remove redundant activities and prolong activities that largely cover the needs of the target group. Thus, the programme has the opportunity to maximum the potential to attain the general objective.

The effectiveness takes into account whether the objectives formulated in the programme have been achieved, which were successes, but also the external factors that created difficulties or positively influenced the programme and the extent to which the chosen solutions were appropriate (Evalved 2013, 55). Effectiveness is closely related to relevance; Objectives can be achieved to a small or large extent, but the ultimate aim is to meet the identified needs and mitigate the effects of the social problem on which it is being acted.

Another assessment criterion that guided the approach is sustainability. Sustainability is the filter that quantified the extent to which the immediate achievements and results of the programme are sustainable, remain after the programme has ceased funding. Sustainability is important in this assessment because the implementation period of the projects under the programme is relatively short (1 year) relative to the needs of the target group. These needs are recurring so a sustainable action mechanism is needed to satisfy them.

One last criterion on the basis of which the evaluation questions were constructed is that of European added value. This criterion was chosen in the context where the initiative is inspired by the European Youth Capital programme. In view of the fact that the youth sector is a poorly regulated area at EU level, it is of interest to assess the contribution of this national initiative to achieving the general objective of the Union on young people. European added value is a concept used to qualitatively quantify the indirect or unexpected effects of the programme that could be extended to the other Member States.

The assessment is strongly concentrated on the use of the results and recommendations developed and on the development of the evaluation capacity of the programme management team. Taking into account the fact that there are no similar or complementary initiatives at national level with which this programme can create synergies, the performance of the youth field in Romania is largely due to this programme. Therefore, the analysis of its success is essential. The development assessment is apparently antagonical to the formative one, but I prefer to look at it in complementarity. This allows the

identification of those elements that do not require improvement, but development. For example, the formative assessment could insist on improving activities for the target group, while through the development assessment, the target group would be radically reconfigured. The development assessment introduces the prospect that adaptation to the context (even when it involves major changes) is not a signal of the failure of the programme, but an opportunity to target resources in a more effective way and Relevant to the current context.

In the process of evaluating in development the involvement of the program management is a sine qua non condition (Quinn 2011, 75). The development assessment can also be applied internally. The results of the evaluation will be disseminated to all programme and project-level implementation teams. In order for the internal assessment to become a functioning mechanism in the future, it is necessary to develop the capacity to evaluate the leadership of the programme.

Secondary to the development assessment, the process has an innovative component of empowerment for the organisations involved. A fundamental result is the consolidation of self-determination (Fetterman and Kaftarian 1996, 4). The progress of the evaluation process was doubled by a learning process for the management team. The activity was a collaborative one and not a didactical one. In discussions with customers, their needs were expressed on improving the programme. The recommendations developed take into account these needs and propose tools that can be used independently by the programme management team.

The ultimate aim is to realise the benefits of the evaluation and the evaluation process to emerge from the exclusive expertise of some evaluators, becoming an accessible mechanism for the internal resources of the organisations. The autonomy in conducting the programme evaluation will enable them to improve the capacity to respond to challenges, crises, unforeseen situations.

1.2.1. Methodology

The research question around which my scientific approach was outlined is: to what extent does the "Youth Capital of Romania" programme bring added value to European youth policies? My hypothesis is that this programme is connected to European youth policies and uses European tools and best practices. I will follow how this initiative contributes to the development of the National youth field, if and how the effects of the supranational level extend. As is apparent from the hypothesis stated, the dependent variable, the youth policies at European Union level, are in relation to the independent variable, the evolution of the programme "Youth Capital of Romania". Research has assumed two steps: analysing the content of relevant documents in the youth sector at national and European level, and field research.

Regardless of the type of techniques applied, research is based on a predominantly qualitative approach. The analysis units for the analysis of content will be on the one hand normative acts at national and European level to establish similarities and differences between them, on the other hand, will be the three projects embedded in the programme "the Youth capital of Romania". By default, analysis units also become organisations that have implemented the projects and organisation that developed the programme to analyse their management skills and to what extent they constituted positive or negative factors in achieving Objectives. In contrast to the policy analysis that will be descriptive, the analysis in the case study will be of an explanatory nature, following causal relationships between phenomena (e.g. if the erroneous identification of the needs Target group is affected by the quality of the objectives set and results).

The analysis of the implementation of the programme has incorporated two case studies representing the only two projects that have been implemented so far. These case studies were instrumental, following the verification of the contribution of the objectives and results of the two projects to the overall objective proposed in the programme. During the evaluation, a third case for the study was selected – the project in Baia Mare. Given that this project was in the

initial phase of implementation, the research was an exploratory one, rather designed to provide an evaluation model for the intermediate and ex-post stage. The main purpose of the evaluation is the use of the evaluation results, the improvement and/or development of the programme and the improvement of the evaluation capacity of the management team through by developing new evaluation tools and mechanisms. The beneficiaries of the evaluation are the programme board team, Ministry of Youth and Sport, youth organisations at local and national level, academic environment.

Two focus groups were made with governance members and some members of the project implementation team in Bacau. This method has enabled the dynamization of discussions through the interaction between participants and the deepening of the programme in its complexity. The application of this method has had the advantage of clarifying key aspects of the programme and finding out data that is not available from documentary sources. This framework has favored the reflection on the progress of the programme, on good practices and the challenges encountered.

Based on the focus groups, with the overcoming of the exploratory dimension of the research, the relevant persons were identified to deepen certain aspects related to the program in individual interviews face-to-face or by telephone. The individual interviews made were based on a semi-structured grid, to allow data collection for evaluation questions without limiting the freedom of the interviewed person to add elements deemed relevant by it, to reformulate or interpret certain concepts (Evalsed 2012, 183). The interviews were especially useful due to their high degree of flexibility and the advantage of collecting spontaneous and complex responses. Interaction in front-to-face interviews provided additional data by observing the behaviours and attitudes of individuals. At the same time, the respondents were provided with feedback, with the aim of enhancing their knowledge about evaluation

1.2.2. Research limits

Access to people relevant to research has been a difficult one due to the territorial spread of project implementation teams and low study time. At the same time, these people and their organisations are not very visible in the public space, and getting in touch with them has been a challenge. Moreover, although the specific terminology of the evaluation is similar to that of project writing, I have found the need to explain and reformulate some concepts to ensure the unified understanding of the intervention.

The low number of people who participated in the focus groups has the disadvantage of contaminating respondents' opinions through interpersonal influence. The facilitator of a focus group is the one who takes the lead in the dialogue, which leads the respondents to take a passive role. However, this risk has been transformed into the opportunity to provide information about the evaluation process to be internalised by the participants.

Empirically, we have noticed that respondents are becoming more responsive when they receive information about the opinion of others on the evaluated issues. This helps them to join a position, either agree or are in opposition. As moderator, I tried to maintain an objective position and to make valuable this dynamics. I believe that the respondents' curiosity to find out the views of the other interviewed persons is determined by the fact that there was a first-time assessment mechanism that engaged all the stakeholders of the programme and in this way all could know conclusions that they would not have discovered in other contexts. Indirectly, we have mediated a form of networking between the main actors involved in the programme, but it is a limited mediation of the risk of errors (average fidelity of transmitted data).

Another limit of research is that the replies collected may contain distorted information (bias) or the phenomenon of 'self-deception in good faith' (the respondent is convinced of the correctness of the answer). Given the fact that interviewed persons are part of the group of those involved largely in the implementation of the programme, there was a tendency to defend the programme, to manifest subjectivity on the success of the programme, to overestimate Results. In order to minimize the risk of these errors and ensure

the validity of the data, we resorted to confronting information in interviews with information from public documents. The purpose of the evaluation was also expressed in each interview so that we promoted awareness of the expression of failures to become lessons learnt. At the same time, the quantitative analysis of aggregated data from interviews has enabled the identification of common perceptions of the programme and the isolation of those subjective perceptions. I believe that the interviews made by telephone have ensured greater control over the discussion and an orientation of the discussion to the key points, avoiding deviations, but cannot guarantee the same degree of sincerity.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE 'YOUTH CAPITAL OF ROMANIA' PROGRAMME

The 'Youth capital of Romania' programme was launched in 2016 and was inspired by the experience of implementing the 'European Youth Capital' programme in Cluj in 2015. This initiative aimed at young people has as a general objective the development of urban youth ecosystems in Romania. Under the programme, youth NGOs are encouraged to collaborate with local and secondary authorities with the private environment for the pursuit of activities for young people. Annually, a competition is held, following which a Romanian city receives the title and is the beneficiary of a financial prize to begin the activities described in the application dossier. Sources of funding for all activities foreseen in the project are diverse: it can be the local budget, European funds or private sponsorships. The responsibility for identifying sources of funding lies with the local implementation team. The application of the principle of participatory budgeting is encouraged-"involvement of citizens in a democratic process of deliberation and decision to determine the optimal way to spend (part of) the public budget".

The governance commission of the title of the Romanian Youth Capital is responsible for ensuring the management of the programme, "including the

creation and management of the methodological framework, the creation of premises for the existence of a permanent Secretariat, The creation of an independent jury and the creation of conditions for monitoring ". The governance of the "Youth capital of Romania" consists of the Youth Council of Romania (CTR), the Youth Federation of Cluj (FTC), the PONT group and the Commercial Bank Romanian (RCB). The two organisations operating in Cluj-Napoca were involved in the implementation of the European programme, during which the partnership with RCB was developed. The Romanian Youth Council is the main non-governmental partner in the central government decision-making report, advocating for defending young people's rights and putting their needs and interests on the political agenda. CTR is a member of the European Youth Forum and represents the young Romanians in the dialogue with the United Nations, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, involving the development of youth policies at European level and International. The Youth Council of Romania participated in the elaboration of the White Charter of the European Commission - "A new impetour for European Youth" (2001), the European Pact for Youth (2005) and the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field 2010-2018 (2009). At the national level, the Romanian Youth Council participated in the elaboration of the "National Youth Action Plan in Romania", "Law No. 146/2002 on the legal regime of the county foundations for youth and the Municipality of Bucharest and the National Youth Foundation ", " Law No. 425/2004 on the establishment of the National Youth Day ' and ' the Youth Act No. 350/2006 ". Currently, CTR is part of the national Working Group on structured dialogue.

The pilot project of this programme was implemented in Timisoara from 2016-2017 to 2020, by the Timiș Youth County Foundation, also a member of the LNG for structured dialogue. The next city to obtain the title was Bacău. The objective of the mandate of Bacău was to identify the potential of young grocery stores and solutions to keep these young people in the city as Bacău faces a massive decline in the stable population. In 2018, Baia Mare holds the title valid until May of the year 2019 and managed by the FONT (Federation of Youth NGOs) Maramureș.

3.1. Evaluation report

3.1.1. *Summary*

This evaluation report records the progress of the "Youth Capital of Romania" programme on the basis of 4 criteria: relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and European added value, and addresses recommendations to improve the implementation and development process of the programme as a whole. The recommendations will be formulated specifically for each evaluation criterion, but also on a horizontal level. The evaluation will highlight good practices and lessons learnt to meet the challenges and risks in achieving the programme's objectives.

3.1.2. *Relevance*

The youth field faces challenges both from the point of view of socio-economic conditions and from the perspective of civic participation of young people in decision making process.

The share of the young population in the European area is decreasing. In the European Union, only one-third of the population consists of children and young people under 30. Until 2080, a return to the share of the young population in the previous '90s is not foreseen (the point at which the decline began due to a decrease in fertility, the number of children born and births at an advanced age). This minority population is or will also constitute the economically active population segment. In order to strengthen sustainable development, it is a priority to ensure vocational training and the labour market insertion of this social category. According to Eurostat, the young population of Romania (aged 15 to 29) decreased from 2008 to 2016 by about 30% and represents around 20% of the total population. Considering also the fact that Romania is recording the strongest migration rate in Europe, demonstrates the need for a strategic vision and interventions for young people and their well-being.

Moreover, 1 out of 5 young people between the ages of 20 and 34 in the EU are classified in the NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) phenomenon, and the Romanian rate exceeds the European average. Although a downward trend has been recorded in the last 3 years, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 in Romania remains above the European average (in 2017, Romania – 18.3%, the EU average – 16.8%). The challenges that threaten the conditions for a decent living have resulted in changes in the transition from student to employee status. Traditionally, young people were getting a job after completing the highest level of education/training. Nowadays, this transition is unpredictable, its duration being extended. Young people get stability in the labour market later as they change more jobs at the beginning (part of them skip this transitional phase by working even during the study phase). Therefore, it is essential to understand, on the one hand, the expectations of employers in the labour market, on another part of young people seeking a job, or the reasons why they do not seek to get employed. Employers have a wide range of candidates, and their non-admission depends rather on the lack of basic skills (literacy) and less on their lack of experience. Young people who have a low level of qualification risk remaining in a low income cycle and limited opportunities for advancement in career. Young people from vulnerable groups are either inserted into the labour market very early in order to be able to support themselves, or have difficulty finding a job, and the division based on the criterion of experience postpones this insertion.

Moreover, it is a priority to identify the challenges of young people in vulnerable groups in accessing forms of vocational education and training. The obstacles are related to reduced community facilities such as transport and poor education infrastructure, lack of teaching staff or didactic materials, but also adverse conditions in the family environment. In 2016, there was an increase in the rate of severe material deprivation in Romania, and this is particularly accentuated among young people.

A significant challenge for medium and small towns as a population in Romania is the migration of young people. 'Migration and commute are probably the best indicators of territorial competitiveness. The reasons why the population chooses to move to another city are diverse and complex, ranging from

education and work opportunities to personal reasons (e.g. marriage), but also to reasons like quality of life, the possibilities for making shopping, artistic and cultural life, the presence of people who share the same vision or the appropriate climatic conditions.'

According to the interviews, one of the sources used to identify the needs of the target group was the Diagnosis on the Use and Allocation of Funds for Young People (2015), carried out in a project in which the Youth Council of Romania has been one of the partners. The report shows a number of issues raised by youth organisations regarding the funds in the field: lack of transparency and involvement of young people in their management, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of their use, lack of information. The analysis highlights that the minimum standard (meaning the establishment of a youth fund according to the legislation in force by the local public authority) is met by 30.88% of the local public authorities responsible (the response rate was 78.4%). Also, the study emphasized the low interest of the authorities to finance youth activities at national level, as well as good practice in absorbing the local funds allocated (e.g.: Cluj-Napoca - The European Capital of Youth).

In 2014, Romania had one of the highest participation rates for young people (aged 15 to 30) to vote in the EU. Romania also recorded one of the highest intent rates to run in electoral elections among young people from the age range 15-29 years at the European Union level. This trend was maintained in 2017. However, the percentages of young people participating in a sport club, a youth organisation, a cultural organisation, a local community-centered organisation, a political organisation/political party, a human rights organisation or an environmental one are below the European average. The rate of volunteering among young people is below 30%. 85% of young Romanians claim that they did not have the opportunity to volunteer outside the country.

Following the interviews, the programme objective was clarified as a more specific one, which concerns increasing the civic participation of young people. The needs of the target group have been partially identified and the objectives cover to a moderate extent the needs of young people in Romania. The general objective respects the strategic priorities and legislation in the field of youth at national and European level.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to operationalize the general objective with the introduction of new specific objectives. Given the above presentation of the challenges of young people in Romania, the objective of increasing civic participation among young people in urban environment is important, but it is not enough. It is recommended to adapt the programme and to formulate new objectives in connection with action on improving socio-economic conditions in order for the initiative to become more relevant in the current context. Given the minor contribution of other complementary measures at local, regional or national level to the development of urban youth ecosystems, the performance of this programme is significant. In order for the programme to achieve a major impact, its suitability to the needs of the target group is essential.
- The objective of obtaining youth funds must be addressed as an instrument for achieving other objectives related to the specific needs of young people at local level, and not be confused with the general objective of the programme.

3.1.3. *Effectiveness*

The general objective - 'the development of urban youth ecosystems' is an ambitious one and allows a wide and varied range of actions for its fulfilment. The objective is innovative by using the concept of 'youth ecosystem' to mark the representation of the needs and interests of young people in all subdomains. The specific objective - 'increasing the civic participation of young people' was internalized by the implementation teams of the 3 projects included in the programme. However, there are also measures that address a wider spectrum of needs (in the category of social and economic ones).

The programme has achieved its objective to a limited extent by facilitating cooperation between youth NGOs and local authorities. According to interviews, 'the title is something abstract, it is an illusion that coagulates all the

forces in the city. The mechanisms generated by the programme help the society overall'. In both Timisoara and Bacau, the institution of the City Hall was identified as an open, involved, proactive actor who supported the ideas and activities of young people and accelerated the implementation of measures from the application portfolio.

The objective of the Timisoara team - 'stimulating the activity of youth organisations and diversifying leisure options (in particular, out-door activities for young people)' contributes largely to the overall objective of the programme. Within the pilot project, local youth organisations became more active due to the ownership of this title. By promoting the project in high schools, young students became aware of the opportunities to practice volunteering in their city. Thus, a category of young people excluded until the time of the project was involved in the youth activity. The increase in civic participation of young people has been pursued through public consultations conducted to discuss local needs such as urban mobility or the design of recreational spaces. For example, it was placed on the city's agenda the problem of identifying a location for a skate park and a temporary solution was implemented. One of the activities that has achieved its objective to a lesser extent than expected is the programme 'What am I doing in the neighborhood?' which included 6 projects based on needs identification activities through neighbourhoods. This was an opportunity to rethink the approach to direct access to young people.

The project in Bacău was based on the need to reduce youth migration. Its objective contributes largely to the overall objective of the programme. The objective was operationalized by a series of result indicators assigned to achievement targets, which is a good practice given that the methodology for the selection of applications did not impose such a condition.

The largest contribution of the winning title was the increase of the youth funds allocation from the local budget during the Bacau - Romanian Capital of Youth. However, the funding awarded by the competition on Law 350/2005 resulted in a absorption of funds of less than 50%. This indicates a limited involvement of all youth organisations in the municipality in obtaining funding for the development of their potential.

Cultural and leisure activities have generated positive results that have contributed largely to the increase in project performance. Whether it is new activities or activities that have already existed and has been attributed to them a greater extent because of the title, they have shaped the image of an intensification of youth activity at the local level.

Another result of the project is overcoming the indicator target of the number of volunteers involved. According to the interviews, the competences of volunteers were developed to a moderate extent. At the end of the project, indicators were reported that are not found in the list of initial indicators, such as the number of volunteer hours or the total number of beneficiaries in Bacau (the number of young beneficiaries was initially tracked). The low consistency between the set and reported indicators indicates that it was identified during the implementation of the risk of failure to achieve the targets assumed, which is why it was preferred to present indicators reported at baseline 0 to Quantified the performance of activities. Other indicators were not reported at the conclusion of the project because they are of impact and not of results, difficult to measure after a period of one year (e.g. increased employment rate, focusing on certain target groups, including Young people aged 15 to 25, persons with disabilities, persons with complex family responsibilities and other socially deprived persons).

According to the interviews, in the process of writing the application, the involvement of the relevant actors was moderate, which allowed limited knowledge of the needs of the young people in Bacau. However, the practice of the consultations was developed during the project. For example, consultations were conducted with the city Hall to improve the methodology for the application of law 350/2005 on the regime of non-refundable financing from public funds. It has become more flexible for youth organisations wishing to propose initiatives with funding from the local budget.

The development of existing youth structures and new structures was an objective that assumed challenges. The Youth Advisory Council, established in 2016, was not convened during the title. Although this responsibility falls within the jurisdiction of the city Hall, a advocacy process has not been developed for this case to the extent appropriate. It was also not included in the structure of

the municipality management a new selection for the youth sector. The reduced responsiveness and influence of the political decision by local youth organisations was also visible in the case of budget correction that reduced the budget allocated to the Youth centre.

	External positive factors that influenced the project				External negative factors that influenced the project			
	Colaboration with the city hall	Human resources	Support of the presidential institution	Support of the RCB	Reduced implication of the private sector	Reduced visibility of the project	Bureacracy	Limited financment sources for youth sector
Timisoara	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Bacau	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

The factor that had the greatest influence on the results of the projects (to involve as many young people as possible) was the low visibility of the projects among young people. The visibility of the programme among central public institutions was ensured by distributing information and promotion materials in the media. Instead, among young people, despite the information campaigns carried out, visibility was not increased to the extent expected. Reduced availability of promotional and branding funds has been reported to appeal to advertising forms with a large impact on the public. Visibility has been largely ensured through social media channels. Although there were significant positive factors, the high patronage of the President of Romania (granted to this programme for a period of one year) and support from RCB did not greatly increase the awareness of the programme at Level of the young population.

The reduced involvement of private actors was caused by the lack of communication and understanding of the benefits of community involvement in the form of collaboration with youth organisations and local authorities. From the interview conducted in Baia Mare, it emerged that the relationship with the private environment is better than that described in Timisoara and Bacău, due to improved communication.

Except for these identified external factors, a positive internal factor should also be mentioned in the case of the Timisoara team: the experience of the implementation team and its ability to write and project management. The project in Bacău acted as a negative internal factor in the lack of homogeneity of the team (since the federation is a newly formed organization in which the members did not have the opportunity to know themselves well) and especially the lack of experience of the implementation team. This explains the difficult interaction with public institutions and the perception of bureaucracy, access to information and guidance, understanding of procedures, unsigned issue by the Timisoara team. At the same time, European funding sources were limited during the implementation of the Bacău project, so the management team had reduced opportunities to practice project writing.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to diversify activities in order to cover all the needs of the target group.
- The activation of the Local Group would represent a positive factor in the implementation of future projects.
- It is beneficial to develop the mechanism for analysing the efficiency of the programme and projects, provided for in the agreement on awarding the title "Youth Capital of Romania" to Bacău and the implementation of the Bacău programme, the youth capital of Romania 2017-2018. The publication of cost-benefit analyses ensures transparency in the spending of public funds and has the advantage of presenting the situation in a clear and accessible manner.
- It is advisable to clarify the concept of civic participation with a view to formulating a set of programme indicators. They can be qualitative or

quantitative, suitable for measuring the social benefits brought by youth.

Examples of indicators: conducting an advocacy process for an important cause for young people, number of regulations in the developed field (strategies, guides, methodologies, etc.), number of new volunteers, number of new youth organisations/structures, The percentage of locally active youth organisations, etc.

- It is recommended to maximise the influence of positive external factors such as the support of central public authorities and RCB, while reducing the influence of negative factors on results.

3.1.4. Sustainability

This issue is addressed in the contest of application for the title so that each implementation team must develop a mechanism for predictability of project sustainability. According to the interviews, the projects are monitored post-implementation, and members of the management teams are connected to allow the exchange of experiences. Some of them are part of the new jury formula that will assess the candidacs of the following participating cities. Partnerships have also been developed between cities.

In Timisoara, the program "What am I looking for in the neighborhood?" and continues to carry out youth activities similar to those during the title, with the indication of decreasing the number of participants. The Timiș County Youth Foundation offers training courses to other youth organisations in the city for writing projects with the aim of developing organisations and their work. According to data collected from interviews, volunteers involved in the project period remain active.

After 2 years of the project, the youth budget has been diminished and there have been challenges regarding the applications for financing caused. The reduced budget also explains that a change has been introduced in the collection of local taxes and taxes, and because new priorities have been stepped up on the public agenda: funding of cultural activities in the context of the candidacy for

the cultural capital European Union 2021. The risk of insufficient funding in the youth field is a moderate one.

In the interviews, there were identified in BACAU risks relating to human resources: on the one hand, limiting their involvement, on the other hand to the competences necessary to ensure the financial autonomy of the Federation. The local youth budget has been diminished as a result of the analysis of the efficiency of organisations in accessing funds and spending them. In order to develop the local youth strategy, a protocol has been signed with the town hall by which local authorities are adopting the strategy and the establishment of the Youth centre. The strategy will be formulated in collaboration with a number of experts in the field of public policy, and there is currently a qualitative research (focus group) and quantitative (by opinion poll) to involve as many young people in Bacau in the process and To map the needs of the youth community in Bacau. In order to build the Bacău Youth Centre, feasibility studies are carried out to identify the appropriate location.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to develop a network communication system between the governance of the programme, organisations from winning cities, organisations wishing to apply in the future and organisations whose application has been declared unsuccessful. This interaction would encourage teams that did not get the opportunity to implement the project to re-apply with an improved application, incorporating good practices and lessons learnt from teams that had the title experience.
- It is advisable to maintain the approach adopted by the two project teams, namely maintaining the relationship with public authorities and partnerships whereby the identified priorities are still undertaken.
- We recommend the Ex-post monitoring of the project in Bacau under the agreement for 3 years.

3.1.5. *European Added Value*

Firstly, it is encouraged to consult all relevant EU-wide documents in the youth sector with a view to completing the application form. According to the interviews, the programme's experience prepares youth organisations for drafting the candidacy for the title "European Capital of Youth". For example, in the case of Timișoarei, experience has provided know-how for both the application for the European programme and the title "European Capital of Culture 2021".

The programme promotes European principles and values and encourages the use of the structured dialogue tool. In projects, volunteers from Member States were involved through mobility projects. Indirectly, connecting young Europeans to the programme is achieved by interacting with the members of the governance in European Youth forums and councils. In the interviews is underlined the viability of the programme in the immediate vicinity of Romania and taking over this initiative as good practice (for example, in Ukraine).

Recommendations:

- Develop partnerships with youth organisations in the Member States of the European Union. It would be useful to connect to the network of cities that were European capitals of Youth for cities in Romania wishing to run for this title to obtain relevant feedback about this experience.
- Develop mobility for young people on any subject of interest to young people or to facilitate the activities proposed in the application dossiers.
- Increase the visibility of the programme by disseminating results and promoting them extensively.

3.2. *Horizontal Recommendations*

- The development of the media relationship is fundamental in order to promote the programme among beneficiaries, to attract partners from the private environment and to increase awareness of the mobilisation of the youth sector in carrying out activities Beneficial for the community as a whole.
- It is recommended to increase knowledge of European funding sources for local organisations that have implemented projects under the programme in order to facilitate sustainability and to maintain the connection to priorities, but and the European technical and administrative procedures.
- It is recommended that each application be based on an analysis of the needs of the target group at local level. The making available of project substantiation models before opening the call for applications is an element that is subject to development.
These analyses can be type: the logical matrix of the project, mapping of all interested parties (stakeholders), problem tree and Objectives tree, SWOT analysis, etc.
- Keeping a standard application form is beneficial. Thus, an application quality standard is ensured and essential analyses are imposed which may otherwise be omitted (e.g. risk and sustainability analysis).
- It is recommended to publish the winning applications of the title with a view to providing a working model and a model of transparency. This measure would encourage the participation of organisations which cannot assess their capacity outside a test framework with clearly formulated requirements.
- It is recommended to create mechanisms to strengthen the relations between the members of project implementation teams in order to maximise the ownership of the proposed objectives and the effectiveness of teamwork. In this way, the risks attached to the project management are reduced. For example, organizational strategies can be created to steer team action.

- It is encouraged to improve the capacity of the Monitoring and evaluation programme management team. It is recommended to develop a complex system for obtaining feedback from the organisations involved. The management team may choose to delegate the evaluation or develop their own assessment skills by participating in specific training courses, interaction with experts, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of the "Youth Capital of Romania" programme was an empowering process and an opportunity for governance of the programme to estimate the relevance of the objectives, the effectiveness of the measures, the sustainability of results and the European added value of the initiative as a whole.

Good practices have been identified, as well as elements that require improvement or transformation. Following the evaluation, targeted recommendations have been developed for each assessment criterion, as well as a number of general recommendations to improve the management of the programme and to facilitate its implementation in future projects. The developmental evaluation accelerated an improvement of the evaluation capacity of the management team by developing an evaluation mechanism similar to the one designed for this case study. It was the most versatile type of evaluation for understanding a complex programme such this one, and due to its flexibility were collected many evidences that seemed to not be the object of the evaluation in the initial phase.

The analysis of the youth field is therefore a complex process in which many study variables are difficult to control, but it is a necessary and useful approach, essential in setting up relevant and effective public policies and youth programmes.

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