

Title: *The impact of non-formal education on youth participation in civil society and the role of NGOs in this process.*

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of non-formal education on youth participation in civil society in general and its specificity in Azerbaijan. Identify the role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in this process and make the policy proposals applicable on the national and local levels.

Significance: A clear understanding of the role and nature of the non-formal education would determine the distinct instruments and methods necessary to increase youth's participation and role within civil society. The ongoing transition processes and democratic developments put an increasing pressure on policymakers in order to actively involve young people in decision-making process. However, the existing problems such as conventional culture of youth participation in society, unemployment, lack of social integration and social inclusion, health and well-being make this process extremely difficult. The role of the education as the key factor is particularly important. This research and following policy proposals could be very useful for regional and international policymakers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international youth NGOs active in the region in order to assess the youth issues and work on the common tools and directions to involve more young people into civil society.

Background: The youth issues became crucial for Azerbaijan society from the very moment of regaining independence after the break up of the USSR. Young people were actively involved in the process of democratization and state building. Further the state developed, more evident was that there had to be a clearly identifiable National youth policy. The establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, organization of the National Youth Forums - are the examples of the attempts undertaken by the government authorities. These were clearly demonstrating the shift from the conventional understanding of the role of the young people, developed in socialist system, towards contemporary democratic principles.

This process requires a huge investment and coherent policy, particularly for Azerbaijan with its 35% of youth population aged from 15 to 35 years old (State Statistics Committee, 2000). The war situation with neighboring Armenia, economic transition, large number of refugee and IDPs add less relief to this problem. Despite these problems, youth issue is vital and even further reinforced after the acceptance of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe in January of 2001.

In this whole process the education is among the key factors, particularly for young people aged between 15-35, especially as there is a clear trend towards a lengthening of the period of time spent in formal education. It should be clear that education covers not just formal education, but informal and non-formal education and life-long learning. The role of civil society organizations, particularly regarding the non-formal education, is growing. Life-long learning is becoming increasingly important in terms of adapting to the changing demands in the employment market and in society, and the development of Information and Communication technologies require the modernization of many aspects of education.

Particular importance of non-formal education in the region is that it could bring together the young people across the borders of the Caucasian region and could provide the intercultural experience, which would strengthen the integration process in the Caucasus and provide better understanding and peace.

Note: The concept of non-formal education here should be understood as "organized educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives." (UNESCO)

Sources and theoretical background:

There are exist number of research centers within Europe dealing with youth issues:

- Youth Center in Strasbourg, France

- Institutes on youth issues in Finland and Sweden
- Gilwell Center in London, Britain
- Youth Center in Budapest, Hungary – particularly specialized on non-formal education, training and methodology working with young people.

Though, each of these centers have a specific research area within the youth issues, there is not yet a comprehensive research institute particularly dealing with the Caucasus region (although, some training programs aimed in Caucasus are organized by the Council of Europe Youth Centers).

Since youth research is multidisciplinary research field drawing upon sociology, social psychology, social economy, pedagogy and other various sub-disciplines, it would be better defined through its subject of study – youth as a special phase in the “life-course” – rather than through its methodology.

Methodology and data collection:

I will conduct an extensive search of the resources focusing upon the following aspects: legal basis, the institutional infrastructure of the NGOs, youth participation indexes, modern trends in youth work, the methodology of the non-formal education.

1. Literature search of primary and secondary documents

- Extensive analysis of existing literature
- Data collection from official sites on the internet related to the youth work
- Research at the library of the Youth Center in Budapest and Strasbourg

2. Experiment

- The analysis of non-formal education and training at the “Teens to Teens” center.

3. Interviews

- NGO leaders
- Youth leaders
- Local and National authorities

Working Bibliography:

- See **APPENDIX 1**
- Official web sites

<http://www.coe.fr/youth>

<http://www.eycb.hu>

APPENDIX 1

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