

THE EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE AND CIVIC SOCIETY IN PORTUGAL

CATARINA LAINS

Like many European countries, Portugal is experiencing significant shifts in its demographic structure. Specifically the implications of a reduction in the young population resulting in lower levels of young people's participation in the political process. Catarina Lains discusses the important role played by government structures – the State Secretary for Youth Affairs and the Portuguese Institute for Youth and others in facilitating the development of progressive youth policy and how this policy has led to the development of youth services and programmes. The paper goes on to describe the complementary role played by non-governmental organisations such as the National Youth Council which works with government structures to promote the interests of young people. The chapter also discusses the principles of associationism – a principle that enhances the socialisation of young people into democratic politics while fighting exclusion and discrimination. The chapter closes with a number of examples of exemplary youth participation.

Demographic aspects

Population

Portugal is a European country which includes two groups of islands located in the Atlantic Ocean: Madeira and the Azores. The Portuguese population is made up of about 10 million people and 9.4 million live on the continent. Lisbon is the capital and this city has about two million inhabitants with a great population density.

Recent official demographic data points towards a decrease in the total population with an increase in the ageing population. In spite of this, Portugal still has one of the youngest populations in the European Union. The population that is younger than

30 years of age represents about a quarter of the total population. These changes mean that there is a progressive reduction of active young people in social and political life on the one hand, and a growing participation of the older age groups (age 50 and over).

Another demographic pattern has been the growing movement of young people towards cities and the coast, strongly contributing to rural desertification and the decline of the agricultural sector. The industrial and service sectors of the economy are major employers of young people.

In terms of schooling, Portuguese youth, in general, tend to achieve higher levels of schooling than their parents did, mainly as a result of the growing democratisation of education and investment in education. Nevertheless, a large number of students are attending or have already ended the sixth level – or the ninth year of compulsory schooling. The numbers of high school students (10th to 12th grade) is still far from the desired number. In addition, the university students or those who have already graduated only represents less than 10% of the youth population.

The recognition of the importance of education for the future, together with the difficulties of joining the working world explains why people stay longer in the education system. Young people also tend to delay marriage. Young Portuguese people now tend to get married and have children at a later age.

Political and social aspects

Recent Portuguese history has been characterised by deep political and social change. The democratic system was established in 1974 through a *coup d'état* led by military forces that put an end to a 50-year dictatorial political system. Today the Portuguese live in a democratic country based on a semi-presidential form of government, constituted by a Parliament where the various political parties are represented. The parliamentary representatives and the government are elected through direct elections. The Republic President is the highest representative of the nation and is elected by universal vote every five years. In 1980, Portugal signed the entrance to the European Economic Community, beginning a new phase in its political and economic history.

Youth sector – government structures

The Instituto Português da Juventude (Portuguese Institute for Youth), created in 1993 and restructured in 1996, is the key agency. It is a corporate body of public law

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with legal status, administrative and patrimonial autonomy under the aegis of the State Secretary for Youth Affairs and responsible to the Deputy Minister of the Prime Minister. As an executive instrument, it is essential for the implementation of youth policy, and the Institute has the following objective:

To promote the implementation of measures adopted as part of youth policy:

- encourage social integration of young people, supporting their participation in social, cultural, educational, artistic, scientific, sporting, political and economic activities;
- support activities promoted by youth associations;
- encourage civic participation among young people;
- encourage and provide financial and technical support for youth and student associations;
- promote the access of young people to information through the creation, development and promotion of information systems;
- to promote, create and develop programmes for young people, in particular in the areas of: occupation of leisure time, voluntary activities, cooperation, associations, training, mobility and exchange programmes.

The Institute is structured in the following manner.

The Board of Directors, the senior policy making body, is organised on the principle of co-management. It comprises three members nominated by the Secretary of State for Youth Affairs and three members who are directly elected representatives of young people. The young people's representatives are drawn from the Conselho Nacional de Juventude (National Youth Council), the recognised (registered) national youth organisations and the recognised local and regional youth organisations.

There is an Executive Committee made up of a Chairman and two Board members.

The most important departments in the Portuguese Institute for Youth are those for the support (registration) of youth organisations, the delivery of Programmes for Young People, Youth Information, Computing and Computer Training, Health Department and the Equipment and Facilities Unit.

The Portuguese Institute for Youth has 18 regional centres in each of the regional capitals: Aveiro, Beja, Braga, Braganca, Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Evora, Faro, Guarda, Leiria, Lisbon, Portalegre, Porto, Santarem, Setubal, Viana do Castelo, Vila Real, Viseu.

The Support, Studies and Planning Office of the Secretary of State for Youth Affairs was created by decree-law n. 71/96 dated June 8 and is responsible for

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promoting and coordinating – as part of youth policy – international affairs, studies, projects and audits of the management and legal issues of the bodies falling under the aegis of the State Secretary for Youth Affairs.

The International Affairs Division is responsible for promoting, developing and coordinating existing mechanisms and analysing new possibilities of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in youth affairs with other European countries – in the ambit of the Council of Europe and the European Union – and with the Mediterranean basin countries and African countries – especially those with Portuguese as their official language (PALOP) – as well as with the member states of the United Nations.

The Studies Division aims to promote the dissemination of information on youth issues especially through the organisation of debate cycles and the preparation and publication of studies on topics related to young people.

The Management Audits and Legal Issues Division is responsible for developing initiatives of management and legal auditing of the bodies, services and other entities that depend upon or fall under the aegis of the member of government responsible for youth affairs, and also to provide consulting and legal services.

This office includes the following sections: Director (1), Assistant-Director (1); in the Administrative Area, Studies Division, International Affairs Division and Management and Legal Issues Division. The Civic Service for Conscientious Objectors Office. This is a public office of the State Secretary for Youth Affairs that is responsible for planning, organising and coordinating at national level the provision of civic service for Conscientious Objectors. GSCOC also provides technical and administrative support to the functioning of the National Commission of Conscientious Objectors (CNOC).

The Movijovem is a public interest cooperative, of limited liability and dependent upon the Portuguese Institute for Youth. It falls under the aegis of the State Secretary for Youth Affairs. The principal powers of this body are as follows:

- Promotion, support and fostering of youth exchange and tourism programmes, enabling young Portuguese people to establish more direct contact with the realities of the country.
- Development of initiatives that encourage mobility and help enhance the social and educational training of young people, and to strengthen cultural ties between various countries and regions.

In pursuit of its objectives, Movijovem is the management body of:

- Youth Hostels; and

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- Youth Card.

The Foundation for the Development of Information Technologies – FDTI – is a foundation of public interest dependent upon the Instituto Português da Juventude (Portuguese Institute for Youth) and falling under the aegis of the Secretary of State of Youth Affairs. The foundation aims to promote the dissemination of information technologies as a means to contribute towards the human, cultural and intellectual development of young people and to stimulate the free manifestation of their individual capacities, entrepreneurial and creative spirit.

In order to pursue its goals FDTI is responsible for:

- Disseminating knowledge of information technologies in an extensive and systematic fashion to young people within the perspective of their immediate application to the needs of the surrounding community.
- Ensuring access for all young people to information technologies, and to stimulating scientific and technological research.
- Promoting training and information initiatives for young people.
- Encouraging associations based upon the promotion and advancement of initiatives using information technologies.

Non-governmental youth structures

The Conselho Nacional da Juventude – CNJ (National Youth Council) has as its objective to hear the concerns and anxieties of young people, to promote debate and discussion of their problems and to procur potential achievements. Thus the CNJ contributes towards the promotion and development of the association's movement. The council also acts in partnership with the Government in the definition of concerted strategies for young people.

The council is constituted by non-governmental organisations at a national level, and presently has 19 member organisations and 5 associate members. The Youth Advisory Council – CCJ (Conselho Consultivo da Juventude) is the government advisory body responsible for the Youth Sector. It aims to promote policies in this area, with the following responsibilities: to analyse questions related to overall youth policy; analyse questions related to civic participation, and social and economic integration of young people; and assess proposed diplomas of a sectional nature in terms of their impact on youth issues.

The agenda for each meeting is set by the Chairman after hearing the opinions of

the members of the CCJ. The matters discussed by the CCJ will be recorded in the minutes, which must include all written opinions produced by the members. No voting takes place.

Youth participation and associationism

The three-decade period of deep social change in Portugal has produced many changes in social values and behaviour, mainly in the areas of family and sexuality. Moreover, young people are no longer conceived as instruments or political targets, but as the protagonists of both social and future change. Therefore, those responsible for youth policy have been focusing on the promotion and enhancement of young people's social and political participation.

The participation of young people in the associative movement contributes to their personal and social development, enhances their self-assurance and promotes their autonomy. This is in itself an active form of social intervention. Fully aware of this reality, associationism and informal youth groups became the core focus of these youth policies. Aiming to enhance and encourage the participation of young people, the Government policy is based on the following measures:

- creating support and incentives to initiate the participation of young people, and fostering associationism as a space to enhance socialisation and democratic knowledge, as well as being an element to fight against all forms of exclusion and discrimination; and
- a transparent and well thought out intervention from public administrations when dealing both with young people as with the associative movements. Government action will not substitute the young, on the contrary, it will recognise the role they play in the sphere of individual initiative, the right to be different and will respect the autonomy of young people.

Also, the policy aims to create the necessary conditions and mechanisms ensuring that the associative movement participates in the definition and execution of youth policies. In compliance with these objectives, the Government has launched the following programmes and provisions:

- The National Registry of Youth Associations (Registo Nacional de Associações Juvenis – RNAJ). The RNAJ creates the means to identify existing associations, both those with headquarters in the country or abroad, provided the majority of their members are Portuguese nationals or their

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descendants. All youth associations are formed as a corporate entity whose members are 30-years-old or younger, and they may register with the RNAJ.

- The Juvenile Associationism Support Programme (Programa de Apoio ao Associativismo Juvenil – PAAJ) – founded by Edict no. 354/96, dated 16 August, aims to support the activities performed by youth associations and other entities registered with the National Youth Associations Registry (RNAJ) with the exception of those who, despite being recorded in that Registry, remain subject to specific legislation that covers support, particularly in the terms of Law no. 33/87 dated 11 July ruling on Student Associations. This programme blends all the supports granted to youth associations and has permitted the introduction of some coherence and transparency in the allocation of subsidies. Furthermore, through a Development Plan it has created the possibility for associations to obtain, at the beginning of next year, knowledge on activities that will receive support without needing to enter into negotiations or deal with bureaucracy.
- The INITIATIVE Programme (Programa INICIATIVA) – created by Edict no. 745-F/96, dated 18 December falls under the management of the IPJ. It aims to support informal youth groups or non-profit entities that are not registered in the RNAJ and that, although they are not integrated by young people, develop activities for young people with the objective of covering matters of social interest. These supports may take the form of Protocols (candidature to a set of projects) or Precise Initiatives (candidature to a single project).
- The Statute of the Student Associative Officer (Estatuto do Dirigente Associativo Estudantil) recognises the importance of the role of the Student Associative Officer over the years in favour of the development and strengthening of student participation. Furthermore, it has created special conditions to allow young people to follow their studies and carry out these extra-curricular activities that have such a dynamic associative and cultural appeal, within the framework of the school community. Covering the higher education and secondary education school officers, this statute grants them the right to miss class whenever they must participate in meetings held by the associations they represent or in acts that entail an associative interest. In the case of higher education officers – and only while they remain in office – they are allowed to demand a monthly examination in addition to the examinations taken at normal and special times already

covered by the pertinent legislation. They can also demand the postponement of present tasks and written reports, and sitting for written tests on the dates agreed with the professors for when they were unable to attend in the past because of their associative activities which could not be postponed.

Voluntary sector membership by young people

In our society, associations play an extremely important role in training and keeping young people occupied which is why they are considered inherent to citizenship and a contribution to foster social integration. The judicial uncertainty that exists regarding the rights of associations with under-age members was an obstacle that hindered the right of association of under-age young people. This is what justified the legislative intervention of the Government through an initiative taken by the Secretary of State for Youth, which was recently approved by the Legislative Assembly of the Republic. Thus, it is recognised that under-age youngsters between 14 and 16 years of age have the right to access the social entities of these associations provided they have been duly authorised to do so by their parents and are able to do so freely when they are older than 16.

Youth participation in the decision taking process

One of the main Government priorities is to foster an increasingly active participation of young people in our society through open dialogue and their involvement either in decision making entities or in an advisory capacity. Within this context, young people are involved in:

- *Conselho de Administração do Instituto Português da Juventude (IPJ)* [Administration Council of the Portuguese Youth Institute], an organisation responsible for approving the annual budget, plan of activities and the respective report. It also follows-up the activities performed by the IPJ and proposes or even makes recommendations. This Council is formed by six members divided in equal parts by the government and non-governmental (NGO) sectors. The NGO sector is represented through the National Youth Council and the national regional and local youth associations (duly registered in the National Youth Association Registry). There are three

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representatives of the Government. The Chairman of the Council is also the Chairman of the IPJ Executive Committee.

- *Conselho Consultivo da Juventude* [Youth Advisory Council] is responsible for analysing matters related to global youth policies; analysing matters related to the civic participation and social and economic integration of young people; examining sector diploma granting projects related to young people. This body meets every two months or so for an ordinary session and extraordinarily whenever summoned by the Chairman or Portuguese State Secretary for Youth.
- *Conselho Consultivo Regional* [The Regional Advisory Council] is responsible for following up and supervising the activities performed by the regional delegation of the Portuguese Youth Institute. It consists of a maximum of 15 young people from the district where it operates.

The constitution and management of the *Casas de Juventude* [Youth Houses], which fall under the responsibility of the Portuguese Youth Institute, consists of creating special spaces throughout the country earmarked for the promotion and development of youth and their associations. The Youth Houses are managed on a case-by-case basis by bodies that are compelled to participate in the management of these youth associations.

Through their representatives, young people have the possibility of making suggestions and voicing their opinions on the approval or rejection of projects under study during the negotiation of Bilateral Protocols covering Youth, and the Follow-up Group of the *European Youth Programme*.

Other successful experiences in the youth field

Youth participation

In order to address the involvement of young people in political issues, in 2000, during the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, the bodies responsible for the youth sector promoted the European Construction Game ‘projects & ideas’. In its final phase it consisted of simulating a National Parliament where 391 high school students – representatives elected by School Assemblies of 196 schools from all over the country – discussed and voted for different proposals on the European Union’s future. For example, issues such as the existence of a European Union President, the election of the European Parliament representatives, the number of the

European Union Official Languages, the enlargement of the European Union to other member states and the constitution of an European Army.

Although it was only a game it turned out to be an important experience in ensuring the direct involvement of the youth in the discussion of these relevant issues and its positive result shows us how young people are interested in voicing their opinions about political and social matters and in taking part, as far as possible, in the decision making process.

Voluntary work

This January (2001), the Portuguese Youth Institute released a book named *Nós* (Us) containing many examples of youth voluntary work. This book aims to show young people how easy it is to give support to those who are in need and how important this is for them. Moreover, the profits from selling this book will go to the East Timor cause.

The State Secretary for Youth is also planning to build an extensive database of the needs of the voluntary work sector in order to afford quick and direct information to those who are interested in giving their support and contributions. These measures are based on the conviction that often young people would like to collaborate but they do not have the information on how to participate so they give up.

Research and studies

Another area of choice for the Government has been the investment in fine-tuning research and politics, in order to prepare youth for adequate decision making processes around the real needs and concerns of their peers. This is why a protocol was signed in 1996 with the Institute of Social Sciences of Lisbon University, through which the Permanent Observatory of Youth was created. This Observatory intends to continue developing studies and scientific research projects in the area of youth, in cooperation with the two entities going back to 1986. The existence of the Observatory was guaranteed until the year 2000, and it will be extended.

This study programme covers the following areas: sociographic studies; inquiry on values, attitudes and practices of Portuguese youth and monographic studies. It has already produced several studies published by the State Secretary for Youth.

The Youth Observatory is responsible for carrying out a National Survey on Portuguese Youth every two years, always embracing different subjects in order to provide a broader view of Portuguese young people and their reality. It is currently developing the analysis phase of the National Inquiry on Portuguese Youth 1999 and the final results will be released shortly.

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The results of the Inquiry on Portuguese Youth carried out in 1997 were documented in the book: *Jovens Portugueses de Hoje [Today's Portuguese Youth]*, which covers areas of interest such as school and education, the working world, family and family-oriented projects, sexuality, national identity and European citizenship, political attitudes and party trend. It offers a portrait of the practices and representations of the young Portuguese generation in each one of these areas. The State Secretary for Youth has also been promoting studies on youth matters through its Support, Studies and Planning Office.