

# **PROJECT-BASED INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH IN SLOVENIA**

## **PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of the paper is to present three main forms of project work with and for youth in Slovenia. These forms or better programmes are Project Learning for Young Adults run by Ministry of Education and Sport, the Slovenian Scout Association's basic method of work and Young Project Managers as the student section of Slovenian Project Management Association.

Although the fundamental aim of this article is to present some of the organized forms of project work with/for youth, some parallels and differences between the programmes can be summarized. Educational programme PYLA focuses mainly on marginal socially endangered groups of young adults, while the SSA and YPM focus on all individuals, who are interested in the activities of the organizations in question. Nevertheless the activity of YPM is intended for students and youth, who desire something more in their professional life or want to develop them even further, professionally and personally.

Even though there are some significant differences between programmes, their common aspire is their effort to develop young people into competent, responsible and motivated individuals.

Keywords: Project-based youth learning, Learning by doing, Project learning for young adults, Scouts, Scout method, Young Project Managers, Project Management Young Crew

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Project-based work with youth has been present in Slovenia in various forms since 1992, after the Scout Association of Slovenia had created a new basic educational programme and methods of work according to the guidelines of the World Organization of Scout Movement. In the year 1998 a student organization Young Project Managers was created within Slovenian Project Management Association. Its purpose is to promote project way of thinking and project management among youth. The positive effects of project-based work with and for youth on the integral development of an individual were acknowledged also by the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport when a programme Project Learning for Young Adults was formalized in an official act in the year 1999. The author of this article has been a part of two programmes mentioned above. He is a president of Young Project Managers Slovenia for the last 3 years and a leader of a scout troop, responsible for programme, education and motivation of platoon scout leaders since 1997. The experience with these programmes and through his ambition to develop both of the programmes with compiling and implementing the best practice from existing project-based programmes for youth, lead to creation of the article.

## **2 PROJECT LEARNING FOR YOUNG ADULTS<sup>1</sup>**

The incentive for the creation and development of the programme was the fact, that more and more young people leave regular school programmes but are never successfully reintegrated. There are not any integral solutions to this problem in Slovenia's school and education system. The market situation has developed to the point where young people without proper education or working experience do not have equal possibilities for employment. Target group of this programme are therefore young adults without education and/or appropriate working experience.

The Project learning for young adults (PLYA) is a longer form of educational programme, which was intended to be the integral approach to solving the problem of

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<sup>1</sup>According to Velikonja 2000, 1-22.

young dropouts. It is focused on elimination of causes that brought one to drop out of school programme or work. It should strengthen the positive education experience as well as motivate the person to continue the educational programme, that the person has drop out of. It should also help with creating the professional career strategy and enable achieving positive working experience in one's personal environment.

The main characteristic of the PLYA programme is recognition of interests and abilities of participants in the programme, who also participate at planning of the programme content. Participating at the planning of the programme motivates the participants to learn. Consequently, learning itself gets a new meaning and becomes a goal oriented activity.

The main objective of the PLYA programme, however, is to help young adults with acquiring of experience and knowledge, which enable them to be successful in continuing their education or work. By that we assume that factors like: motivation, creation of life strategy, basic general knowledge are more important than educational content itself, because they enable more successful and continuous exploitation of educational resources, which consequently results in more flexible learning further on and provides further support with individual learning.

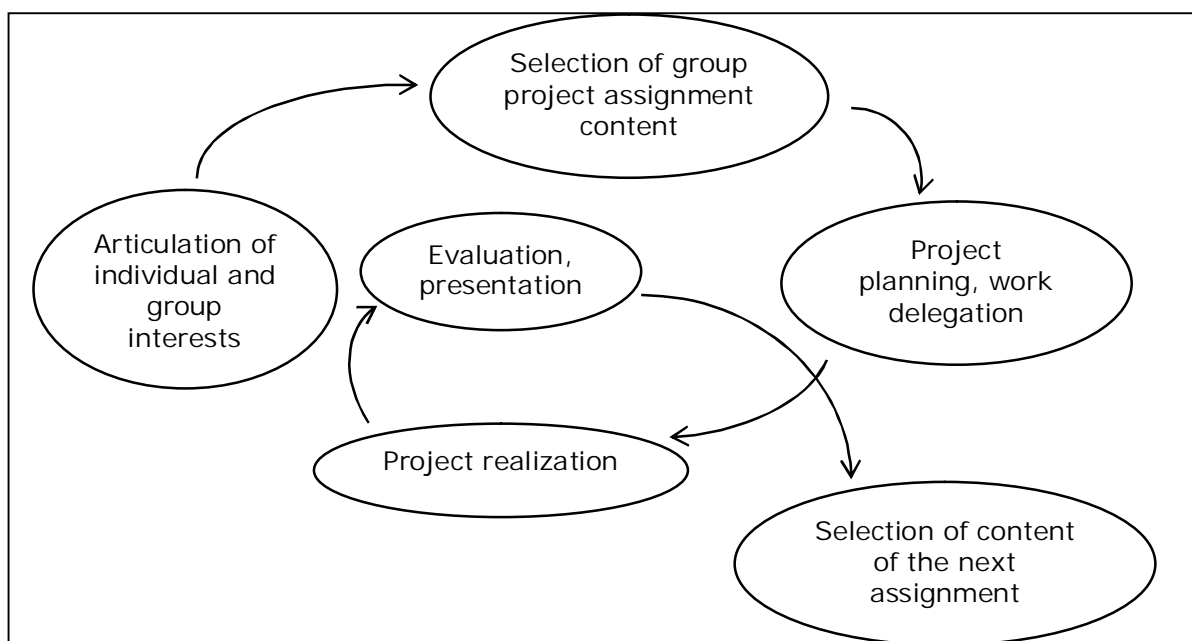
Further on, Velikonja (2000, 11) specifies the basic goals of the programme in details:

- Acquiring functional knowledge, which develops general knowledge and more flexible thinking. Functional knowledge is goal oriented towards contents increasing the possibilities of successful management of scholarly structured environment and everyday life practice.
- Acquiring functional skills, which increase general practicality of one's activities and flexibility of areas of interest. Functional skills are goal oriented toward contents, which enable competitiveness on the workforce market.
- Acquiring positive learning experience, which motivates the individual who dropped out of school and prepares that person for continuing the education (help with learning, where participants are being qualified for independent planning of educational or employment career.

- Developing the skills for critical and problem oriented thinking.

Project based work is the basic organizational form and work method at the same time in the PLYA programme. Execution of the learning project requires a selection of various methods e.g. individual work, work in small groups, practical work, etc. project part of learning for youth and young adults goes by the method prescribed by the ministry of education and sport and is presented in the Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Project planning according to PLYA**



(Source: Velikonja 2000, 37)

Every learning project is created in steps:

1. Expressing and analyzing interests and learning needs of participants as the starting point for definition and selection of project contents. This is the method by which the project content and the basic goals are being selected.
2. Design of project plan and definition of basic project phases, which lead to project assignment execution.
3. Processing of all necessary goals of each project phase.
4. Time and financial planning of the project execution.

5. Work breakdown planning, where participants take part in project assignment on the principle of free choice of the areas of interest. The principle of project work breakdown structure contains a group plan of basic deadlines as well.
6. Definition of learning goals for each individual project goal.
7. Definition of learning resources, methods of knowledge distribution, necessary literature and learning tools.
8. Creation of professional goals.
9. Realization of the learning project according to the WBS.
10. Assessment of the learning achievements and progress of participants.
11. Achievement promotion in the environment.
12. Closing evaluation of the project execution.

The largest downside or better limitation of the government run programme Project learning for young adults is seen by the author in the focus on only marginal social groups of young people/adolescents. In our opinion the project based learning method could be successfully implemented also with other youth population and not only marginal groups.

### **3 SLOVENIAN SCOUT ASSOCIATION (SSA)**

Slovenian scout association is the largest Slovenian youth organization. There are more than 8300 active members in app. 100 units across Slovenia. Scouting is a volunteering, non-political and educational movement for youth, open to all races, religions and beliefs. It acts according to the aims, principles and methods of the world organization of scout movement (WOSM). SSA is the national scout organization and is the full member of WOSM since 1994 (Štajdohar 2003, 13).

The fundamental educational goal which the SSA strives to is to educate a young person to act in a positive and responsible way through his or her adult life and to be aware of his need to progress in his development. The aim of the scout organization is primarily to contribute to education of youth using the value system and thus help creating a better world, where people can fulfil themselves as individuals and actively contribute to society (Štajdohar 2003, 13).

Work in the organization is based on associating in small groups, where a young person can learn about independence, the meaning of connection with peers and interpersonal help, readiness to help those who need it, as well as taking responsibilities and assignments. Above all, they learn to function in groups and the importance of team spirit in the early stages in their life.

The education in SSA is based on values. SSA develops the whole entity of values and not only just a certain individual value. The vital parts of this idea are the basic principles that emphasize integral personal development of the individual: physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual. These principles base on self-esteem and self-actualization and are expressed in the spiritual development, responsibilities for the social development and responsibility for one's own personal development.

Regardless to the environment they live in, the young have similar basic needs: to gain the ability of becoming the architects of their own progress as individuals whose values are:

**Autonomy** – They are capable of deciding and managing their personal and social life.

**Solidarity** – They are capable of showing the care for others, work with them and for them and listen to them.

**Responsibility** – they are capable of accepting the consequences of their decisions, keeping the promises and finishing the things they started.

**Engaged** – They are capable of respecting the values, principles and ideas and are capable to act accordingly.

This is achieved with the development of their abilities as individuals and as members of the community. This goal can be achieved only if the society will enable proper educational possibilities, which will optimally fulfil their needs (Štajdohar 2003, 14).

### **3.1 *Project method of SSA***

The SSA encourages personal growth of the individual. That is why it designed a gradual system of tests and skills that get young members accustomed to making



their own decisions about their lives according to their needs and wishes. Working in the scout organization makes its members face diverse tests in knowledge and physical abilities. The work is organized so that children and young adults learn skills in the fields of nature, scouting, society and community, health and sports, culture, ability and creativity. To advance, to pass the test of knowledge, of ability the members (by their own choice) have to accomplish a certain number of skill tests from each field. This way all the fields of their development are included: physical, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual development and growth of character. For the members this way of work is an introduction to planning their own development in later stages of their lives. The children decide what skills they wish to achieve together with their guides in the beginning of the year and make a rough plan of it. This gets them used to looking to the future. The quality of learned knowledge is “guaranteed” by the Basic Program that is common to all the scout units in Slovenia. And not least the educational program of the SSA is so high quality that representatives from other counties have been taking part in it for years.

In higher age groups and higher in the hierarchy of the organization work progresses in projects, still on a basic level, dependent of the size and complexity of the project. Methods of planning for smaller projects, mostly one-day activities, are basic and covered by one word – NAOMIE. NAOMIE means (Lipar 2003, 3):

**N** – Needs

**A** – Aims

**O** – Objectives

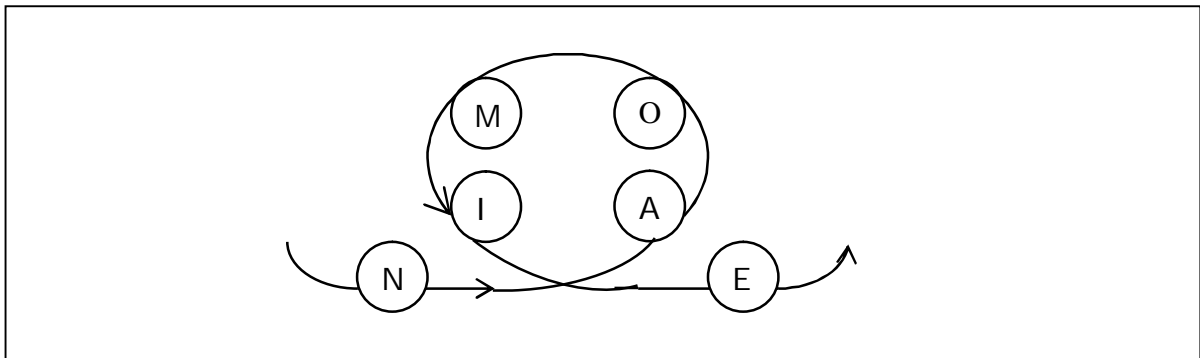
**M** – Methods

**I** – Implementation

**E** – Evaluation

Similar to PLYA, phases of the project can be presented as a cycle, where the results of the evaluation phase are always considered in the assessment of needs at the start of planning a new project.

**Figure 2: Project planning according to NAOMIE**



(Source: Lipar 2003, 3)

The initial planning phase is analysis of operation. In this phase the situation in organization is assessed. The reasons for this situation are defined here as well. Apart from showing us, why the situation is like it is, the diagnosis also triggers the needs for change we would like to achieve.

In the phase aim the meaning of each activity that was identified in the diagnosis phase is being questioned. The objectives are desired future results. With setting the objectives the activity is being “navigated”, whereas the present situation, the foreseen environment, intersection and priority of goals are being considered. The definition of contents is the phase in the process of planning where the activities are defined in details including deadlines for implementation. The method that will be used in the implementation phase is also defined in this process. The plan needs to be implemented. The implementation phase is to be simple, if we had planned everything correctly (Lipar 2003, 4). In our opinion neglecting the importance of implementation can be critical for the success of the project.

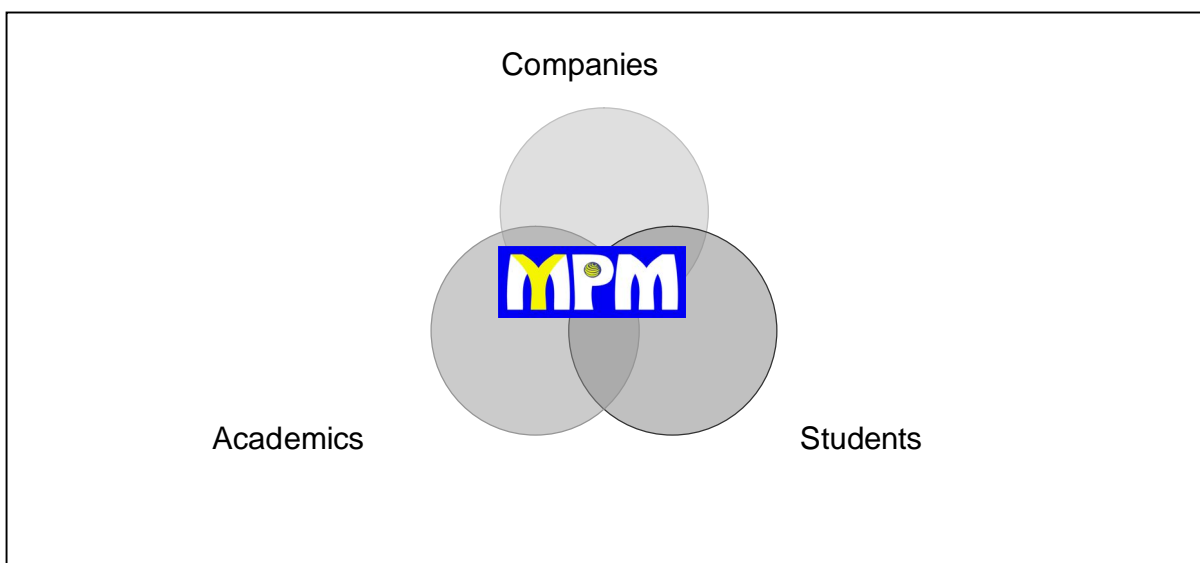
The final or closing phase in the process of planning is evaluation. After the completion of implementation the deviations from the goals and priorities set in the plan are being identified. The cycle is completed with this phase. When all the deviations from the plan are being identified, a new cycle begins with the first phase of planning – the operation analysis. In this way a new cycle of planning is started with the aim to improve the programme (Lipar 2003, 4).

#### 4 THE YOUNG PROJECT MANAGERS SECTION

The Young Project Managers section was established in 1998, when the idea of the section was born at the 14<sup>th</sup> IPMA Global Congress in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The aim of the YPM is similar to PLYA and SSA as it aims to develop young people to successfully function in life. However, it is not focused on marginal groups like PLYA, but on all young adults interested in the project work. YPM provides the opportunities for students and young project managers to develop professionally, to exchange experience in the field of project management and consequently enables them greater competitiveness on the workforce market, especially with employment flexibility and independence.

The area of YPM activities are cooperation with the academic sphere e.g. mostly improvement on the professional field (certification). The section also seeks collaboration with companies, for instance generation of project excursions and presentations of realized projects etc. The most important area of work is definitely the primary function of the section – students. All activities mentioned above are implemented by students with the project method and thus achieve professional and personal development.

**Figure 3: The areas of YPM operation**



(Source: Božič 2006, 2)

In December 2006 the idea of interpersonal education of members came to be in the local committee of Maribor. The members share their experience from different projects as well as everyday and professional problems. This method was tested in the local committee for three months. Its success has encouraged the leaders of other committees to design a strategy of YPM education which would motivate the members further work and personal development.

The assumption is that nobody starts a project with intention of learning a new skill and so adds to his personal growth, for instance business communication. They start a project because of their interest for the topic; their desire to create personal references, networking etc. The essence of integral project development of youth is that in course of a project the individual meets with certain problems. By solving those problems one learns new skills that might not have been foreseeable or necessary in the planning stage. (Only by solving those problems they realize the need to learn various skills which contribute to the success of the project e.g. learning business communication). This means the individual learns from solving an existing problem, so called "Learning by doing". The YPM offers knowledge, help and a positive and supportive, "safe" environment. The mistakes made namely never lead to the social (or other) endangerment of the individual. Another advantage is feedback the individual gets in the phase of evaluation. By comparing the present condition with the previous, the individual can see his or her progress in a relatively short period which motivates him or her for further work. On the bases of the evaluation the individual's future life and professional choices are made easier.

## **5 THE PROGRAMME COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION**

Although the fundamental aim of this article is to present some of the organized forms of project work with/for youth, some parallels and differences between the programmes can be summarized. Educational programme PYLA focuses mainly on marginal socially endangered groups of young adults, while the SSA and YPM focus on all individuals, who are interested in the activities of the organizations in question. Nevertheless the activity of YPM is intended for students and youth, who desire

something more in their professional life or want to develop them even further, professionally and personally.

The further similarities and differences between organizations arise from their methodologies. PYLA and SSA implement their projects as cycles, where the final phase of the last project is closely connected with the first phase of the next project. Most of all, the biggest reproach goes to definition of project phases. Both of the organizations place the phase of implementation and evaluation in the process of planning, which is the phase alone in the methodology of International Project Management Association IPMA. YPM acquires its knowledge in the field of project management through the “mother” organization, Slovenian Project Management Association and so consequently the IPMA. The IPMA methodology is thus the basis for the YPM project management.

Apart from some methodology inaccuracies the advantages of PYLA and SSA programmes are simplicity and transparency. Individual phases are clearly separated and are an excellent beginner’s project management tool for young people. Furthermore the above mentioned programmes give the initial insight in the project management way of thinking and prepare the participants of programmes for further professional and personal development. The International Project Management Association should put more effort into promoting the project management among young people that have not yet taken a part in the official processes of project management education.

YPM is therefore trying to create a gradual system that would enable the members to evolve through managing very simple tasks and proceeding to gradually more complex activities, phases and projects. This YPM uses a very simplified IPMA methodology at the beginning of one’s membership very much alike to SSA’s, but eventually broadens the member’s project management horizon with presenting more advanced and complex project management techniques and tools.

Educational programmes of PYLA and SSA have a very good pedagogic and andragogic methodology. The reason for this is exclusively in more systematic

approach to the programmes. The PYLA is initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport whose one of the fundamental occupations is education and personal development of youth. SSA has developed its system based on 100 years of experience with systematic work with children and youth. Its approach and “training of trainers” has been acknowledged and awarded many times, which clearly shows the competence of people working with children and youth.

On the other hand the biggest disadvantage of the YPM is its pedagogic knowledge. Even though the YPM section has a very strong support in the mother organization of Slovenian Project Management Association with reputable professors and lecturers, students run the section on the principle “students to students”. The YPM tries to compensate the lack of experience with building the strong culture and interpersonal relationship between members - networking. One of the crucial tasks of the YPM leaders is to create a community open to everyone willing to develop his/her potential. Nevertheless, the informal hierarchy structure and open-mindedness offer a great opportunity to share and exchange knowledge between the members.

Regardless of the methods the project work with/for youth is being implemented in Slovenia, the common characteristic of all three programmes is the aim to develop young people into competent, responsible and motivated individuals. These organizations are above all the most aware of the fact that the future lies in integrally developed youth. The integral project development enables that completely.

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