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INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY OF EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Abstract: Methodology of *European Youth Parliament* (EYP), one of the largest educational programmes in Europe, has been constantly developing for more than 30 years. Nowadays it represents a carefully balanced combination between different elements of individual and team work, aimed at encouraging independent thinking and initiative in young people as well as facilitating the learning of crucial social and professional skills. This paper gives a summary of the most important aspects of EYP's methodology and offers insight into the best practices that the organisation implements in its work.

Key words: European Youth Parliament, methodology, education, youth, team work, political debate

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Youth Parliament (EYP) was founded in Fontainebleau, France in 1987 as a school project by teachers. The educational value of EYP events has played a crucial role in the development of work methodology and processes used during event. In the early stages, teachers strived to create engaging projects for small groups of their students, where they would be learning in a different setting, following different processes than in a classroom. Therefore, in its very core, EYP was created from a cooperation between students and teachers. Over the following years, this project started to cross the borders of France and involve more European countries. The international coordination of EYP was established by a teacher in the United Kingdom, starting in 1991. In 2004, the headquarters of the organization move to Berlin, Germany and former members start to be appointed to the Executive Director position [1]. In the current structure and functioning, teachers play a significant role in putting their students in touch with EYP, however events are entirely organised and run by young people.

The EYP network officially recognises a variety of events i.e. session with different lengths and sizes, the largest of which is an International Session – a well-funded 9-day event taking place three times per year, with over 300 participants. The smallest event is an EYP Day, which takes place usually in smaller cities with the aim to popularize the organization on the local level, gathering not more than 50 to 60 participants. This event is usually done with only in-kind sponsorship and last for one full day. The core EYP methodology applies to all sizes and durations of sessions and is used in various forms and adapted depending on the length of the event, number of participants grouped together and even resources available (e.g. materials and supplies, working environment, number of rooms).

Before the start of every session, participants of the event are divided into groups i.e. committees that work on a single topic. These committees are named after the committees existing in the European Parliament, for example the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) or the Committee on Development (DEVE) [2]. All members of a committee are, in session terminology, called delegates. Each committee has one or two chairperson(s) who are the delegates' peers and are responsible for preparing academic materials for the session, creating and leading activities, facilitating discussion and making sure the final output i.e. the committee resolution is factually accurate and represents the views of the committee [3]. All teams participating in the session have their respective team leaders, therefore a president is appointed at every session to lead the team of chairpersons just as the chairperson leads his/her committee. In addition, the organizing team, with the head organizer(s) as leaders, is responsible for the non-academic processes of the session e.g. logistics. It is important to note that, in the EYP methodology, leadership does not entail giving lectures or instructions of an academic nature, it is imperative that the leaders give their teams enough space to create and express their opinion whilst providing only support and training.

2. EYP METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

With the overview of session classification and human resource structures, it can be noted that these sessions differ in many aspects, however there are elements that are the same for all of them and thus these elements form the core of the EYP methodology. They can be split into two categories with first one being the qualitative features of EYP events and the second one the EYP methodology framework. The latter will be analysed first with distinct sections ordered chronologically.

2.1. Preparation

As participants of EYP events are young adults, the topics that are put up for debate are complex and thus demand a high level of preparation before the session. There are two significant aspects of the pre-session preparation:

- *Formulating and selecting topics.* The preparation of the academic proceedings of the session starts with formulating committee topics. Committee topics in EYP cover a wide range of issues, which usually include a European perspective on current policy discussions, societal developments and specialist areas such as science, health and agriculture. Formulating them is a delicate process since they need to satisfy several criteria. Firstly, they need to be broad enough to enable the committee to agree on 5 to 15 actions i.e. solutions to the topic. Secondly, these solutions need to be debatable i.e. there should be more than one way of alleviating the problem. After all the topics have been formulated, delegates will be asked to indicate their topic preferences and are then assigned one. In recent years, more and more area-specific projects are being organized in EYP, such as Power Shifts [4], in which all topics pertain to a broader field.
- *Preparation material.* The material given out before the session usually centres around an Academic Preparation Kit, which is a document containing introductions and overviews of all topics. These are written and prepared by chairpersons and their main purpose is to enable delegates to familiarise themselves with the topic and get a factual overview of the crucial information before the discussion. A topic overview often contains relevance and explanation of the problem, key conflicts, key actors, measures in place, questions to be answered by delegates and links to further research. Each delegate receives topic overviews for all committees, as he/she will debate all the proposed resolutions at the General Assembly. Time is allocated during Committee Work for General Assembly preparation and chairpersons will provide support to delegates wishing to participate.

It is important to note that the role of the delegate is to discuss solutions to the questions posed during the session. The delegates are tasked in their committees with coming up with a policy position in response to the neutral topic question. Delegates are free to propose responses that are as cautious or as radical as they wish, because of their research and stances on the topic.

2.2. Teambuilding

Teambuilding can be regarded as the introduction phase and is not part of the parliamentary simulation. The aim is to try and set the appropriate atmosphere and group dynamics in order for the committee to be able to tackle the problem at hand. When working in a new and very international environment with students who might not be fully familiar with this type of setting, teambuilding is crucial to facilitate a relaxed, trusting and open environment.

The process starts with activities aimed at introducing participants to each other and surpassing the barrier of a first encounter. This is followed by activities in which participants get to know each other more closely. A set of communication and problem-solving activities closes the teambuilding phase, giving an opportunity to every participant to assume his/her natural place in group functioning. The desired outcome of this period is a committee of participants that feel comfortable voicing their opinion and any concerns they might have about how the process is being handled by a group member.

2.3. Committee Work

Committee Work is a central element of the EYP methodology. During this stage, every committee is tasked with writing the resolution on its own topic. The work process itself is informally divided into several stages. Firstly, the participants aim to understand and define their topics in detail, usually through sharing their research findings and group discussion. Following the detailed formulation of the topic problem, an exchange of opinions is initiated with the aim of reaching a consensus about the actions which need to be taken to solve the specific problem. This brings the committee to the final Committee Work product.

A resolution is a document in the format of a list of clauses which summarise the problems identified by the committee and the solutions proposed. The format is in two parts with the first part comprising of the Introductory Clauses describing the current situation and background to the topic and the second part comprising of the Operative Clauses which contain the solutions. Students need to keep in mind that operative clauses should be concrete solutions or further developments of existing solutions, while remaining realistic and in line with existing policies.

2.4. General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) is the section of the event which is based on the decision-making process within the EU's main legislative body - the European Parliament. During the GA, all the resolutions developed by the committees are presented and discussed with other delegates in a parliamentary setting. Until this point, committees are working on writing their own resolutions, and General Assembly is the first part of the programme when all the participants are debating all resolutions written altogether. This means that a certain procedure needs to be followed, which is ensured by the President and Board of the session who facilitate the debates. The procedure represents a simulation of the EP procedure and includes:

- Reading of the Operative Clauses of the Resolution,
- Delivering a speech in defence of your Resolution,
- Three rounds of debate where participants have the opportunity to ask questions in each round and then a delegate from the proposing committee answers,
- Delivering a summation speech in which a delegate from the proposing committee summarises the main issues that were raised during the debate and encourages people to vote in favour of the Resolution and
- Voting.

This part of the process is an opportunity to engage with other topics during the plenary debates and critically assess the proposed solutions by constructively discussing and evaluating the resolutions. In International Sessions, resolutions that are voted through are being sent to the European Parliament. If any of these topics finds its place on EP's agenda, independently from EYP, the resolutions are being taken into consideration during public debate on their proposals as the voice of youth.

3. QUALITATIVE FEATURES OF EYP METHODOLOGY

3.1. Peer-to-peer learning

Peer-to-peer learning has been a cornerstone of EYP methodology since its formation. Research suggests that people are more likely to hear and personalize messages, and thus to change their attitudes and behaviours, if they believe the messenger is similar to them and faces the same concerns and pressures [5]. That, when translated into EYP context, means that young people are more likely to engage and care about the topic they need to tackle, if people facilitating their work are closer to their age. The positive consequences of this behaviour are applied across all teams at a session, from delegate engaging with each other to engaging with chairpersons and organisers. This element is integral to EYP's educational work, because the process of organising EYP experiences for other participants is in itself an educational experience and is empowering young people.

3.2. Simulation of the parliamentary procedure

Most of European Youth Parliament events follow a parliamentary format, but the organization does not seek to strictly stimulate the European Parliament or any other real legislative body or legislature, making EYP's parliamentary format very flexible. The priority is, or at least should always be put on the content, not the procedures themselves. Overall, a parliament is regarded as a forum for citizens to come together and share opinions, debate and seek consensus on important issues. The idea of using parliamentary procedure at EYP events is primarily motivated by the need to have a platform to practically implement values such as democracy, contribution and intercultural understanding. Another equally important aspect is the opportunity for the participants to get familiarised with the decision-making process in the European Union, something that is done in a unique, immersion-based way in the methodology.

3.3. Learning in a non-formal environment

The short-comings of formal education can be identified as the lack of an experience-based aspect and approach. In addition, some of the important issues on which EYP focuses, such as current European affairs and policies, are often not covered in an engaging way [6]. In this respect, the EYP doesn't underestimate formal education but seeks to complement it through its own non-formal, experience-based education model. Furthermore, formal education doesn't always cater to various transversal skills i.e. 21st century skills, identified as important in today's work life and society by the Erasmus+ programme [7]. This is again something the EYP seeks to complement, in particular by helping its participants to learn by doing.

3.4. Consensus-based decision-making

Debating and discussion in EYP is consensus-based. The methodology promotes discussion and seeks consensus, primarily within the committees' work. This does not preclude ideological conflicts and debates, but the aim is to develop ideas and solutions together. Many activities that take place during teambuilding are designed to tackle the group's ability to solve conflicts and reach consensus on polarising issues. That way, group dynamics are shaped into a productive format for future debates and resolution building.

3.5. Internationality

The aim is for the participants to both meet people from different places and encourage them to travel abroad. For example, in International Sessions committees are formed from fifteen people with the aim of having the same number of nationalities if possible. This provides participants with tremendous cultural exchange as well as with the comfort of being in an international environment. Due to the internationality of the organisation, cultural exchange, frequent travels and conferences all over Europe the official working language of all events is English.

3.6. No role-play

The majority of events are conducted in a parliamentary format, but participants always represent and debate their own views and stances. This kind of ownership that participants have is important for two reasons: firstly, it is vital for the motivation and engagement of participants and secondly it gives the participants a platform to express how they personally feel about a problem and engage in a discussion ultimately leading to a solution. In addition, any opinion expressed in the resolution is not an opinion of the European Youth Parliament as a body, nor will it be the opinion of a K-FORCE project, but rather the opinion of all the participants involved in the topic. As mentioned before, the focus is put on the learning and working process, not the end product.

3.7. Expert support

Since topics can often be highly demanding for participants, every committee is appointed a committee expert. An expert is defined as a person who either works in a topic-related field or is very knowledgeable on it. Even though chairpersons are very informed about the committee topic, they sometimes lack the insight obtained by working in the field in question. As was mentioned, chairpersons are not to interfere with the academic process any more than identifying factual information and therefore need not be experts on the topic. It is important to note that experts are usually not present during the whole working process, but rather only a limited amount of time not to damage the learning process. Therefore, it is crucial that experts are able to transfer the knowledge in an efficient way, being free to use all types of aid such as presentations, conversation, questions & answers and so on.

4. EYP AT S-FORCE

As mentioned earlier, the methodology of EYP is adjustable and flexible, according to needs of the event. The S-FORCE event presents an opportunity to demonstrate how the EYP methodology can be applied in different surroundings and with a different group of participants, using its framework and qualitative features, both of which were introduced earlier. The unique nature of this cooperation is seen in factors shaping the methodology different than usual. Firstly, the workshop will last for one day, drawing similarities with an EYP Day. A unique aspect of the event is the fact that participants will mostly be Master students or PhD students, as opposed to usual practice where participants are High School or Bachelor Students. Having in mind that participants possess a certain level of experience in the topics, the chairperson must give additional attention to the preparation stage and his/her methods of leadership and facilitation. This change of the participant group and the goal of practicing parliamentary procedures shift the focus more towards the GA and the debating and voting procedures. In addition, the event will be under the K-FORCE motto *Knowledge for a Resilient Society*, with the topics given to committees pertaining to the field of Disaster Risk Management and Fire Safety (DRM&FSE).

To conclude, during S-FORCE these will be a chance to witness what product young minds are capable to deliver in the field of DRM&FSE guided by EYP methodology. Three to four Resolutions will be made during Committee Work and presented and debated on in the General Assembly. This will be the demonstration of European values and parliamentary procedure put into practice as part of the K-FORCE project.

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