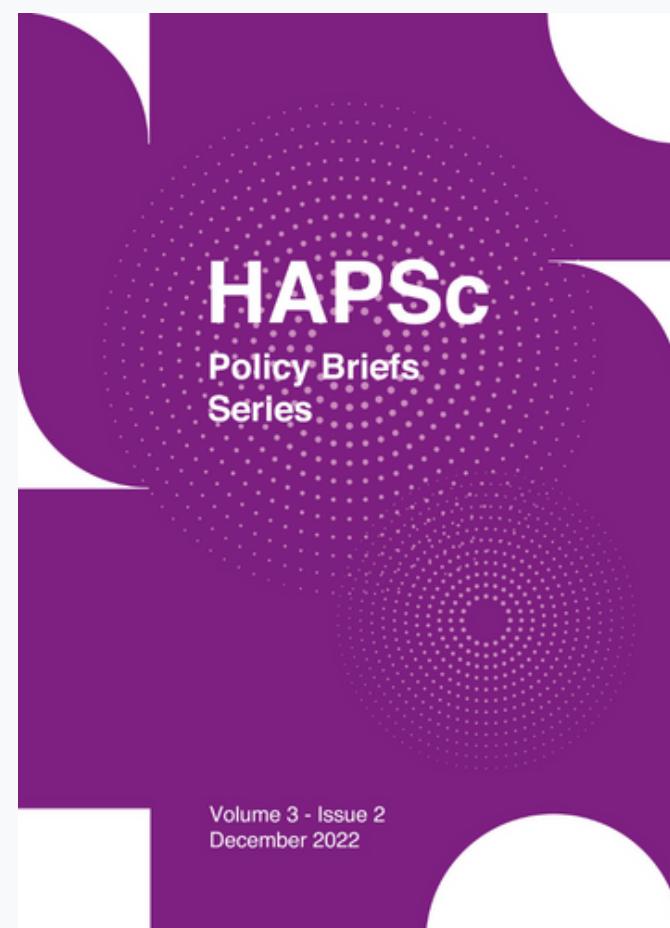


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EUROPAMOBIL: A Vehicle for the European Union to Keep Moving

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EUROPAMOBIL: A Vehicle for the European Union to Keep Moving¹

Michaela Charisi²

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the necessity to increase the connection the European youth has with the European Union. Education policy might be a responsibility of the Member States, but the EU shall take upon more initiatives in order to bring the young Europeans closer to it. EUROPAMOBIL, is a project that can add educational value to the currently covered areas by the European school curricula, without intervening on national territories and can have a positive impact among the youth, which is an interval part for the continuation of the EU and the achievement of its goals.

Keywords: European schools; European education; youth; European identity.

Introduction

Education lays one of the most significant foundations in every society and the European Union is no exception. As the future always depends on the young people, it is of remarkable importance that the education they receive, is able to prepare them with the necessary skills so that they can deal with the challenges of their times. Over the last years some serious steps have been made towards enhancing the European cooperation in this field with the adaptation of the European Education Area and the Bologna Process being among the major accomplishments of the EU (Asderaki, 2017). However, there is yet a wide range of actions that could be taken upon, in order to strengthen the European aspect of education within the Member States.

The lack of European-wise educated youth

The European Union is a unique political formation with more than 440 million inhabitants (Eurostat, 2022a), with more than 15% of them being young people under 29 years old (Eurostat, 2022b), which is a considerably significant percentage. The European Union plays a quite important role in their everyday life, even if it is not that easy to comprehend at a young age, regarding regulations and laws on environment, economy, transportation, energy and so much more domains where the EU holds exclusive or shared competence. However, the Union has much less of an impact concerning the education of the young European citizens as Education is considered to be a supporting competence, in which Member States have the main legislative role, while EU is only there to provide support whenever it is needed (Art.165/TFEU).

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Therefore, Member States and their accountable institutions are all responsible for designing their own educational systems, taking general European guidelines in regard with aims and values into account, with one of the latest common steps being the adaptation of the European Education Area by 2025, agreed in 2018 (Council of the EU, 2018). Even with this important framework, there is no mention of any prospect of adding European-related issues on a regular basis curriculum. Students all around Europe get taught about Mathematics, History, Languages, Geography, but they miss the chance to learn more about the European Union in their school environment as there is no dedicated class in the curricula.

The importance of raising awareness of the European reality

European citizens are entitled to 4 main freedoms that their lives are designated around: the free movement of goods, capital, persons and services as stated in article 26 on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This is a fundamental factor that influences many other aspects of the European way of life and also facilitates the life of the citizens on an everyday basis, if used to its full potential. Nevertheless, to fully take advantage of the benefits deriving from the EU laws, people need to be aware of them. Moreover, education policy's main target is to increase harmony and cooperation within the Union, so that other policies run smoothly as well (Cankaya et al., 2015). And this is where the EU still has a long way to go.

It all starts with having a well-educated youth, aware of its surroundings, neighbors and political reality, not only on a national level but on a European level as well. The truth is that young Europeans are given numerous opportunities, such as the ones mentioned above, by the EU, in the form of legislative protection, youth-dedicated events and platforms or traveling and educational chances that they would not have outside of the Union. However, our European youth does not always have access to the information due to lack of knowledge of the provided tools. The internet has definitely helped increase the access to the opportunities, but still, it cannot solve all the problems by itself if the users do not know what they are looking for. To be more precise, what is missing from European students is gaining knowledge regarding the way the EU operates and its numerous aspects.

European schools' curricula in their majority, do not include educational sections dedicated to European integration, leaving the pupils with a huge gap to fill on their own, except for the Institution of European Schools that are operating throughout Europe. European Schools are "official public educational establishments controlled jointly by the governments of the Member States of the European Union", providing nursery, primary and secondary level of education, especially formed for children of staff of the European Institutions (Schola Europaea, n.d.). These schools, apart from

the usual curriculum, also have classes called “European Hours”, during which pupils get in touch with European expressions of culture, history, traditions, institutions, actuality in general, just like they do for their home countries.

As it is mentioned above, education policy is a national responsibility, in which the EU only gets involved to provide support and assistance. Therefore, the institution of European Schools is a shared responsibility of the Member States, creating expectations and possible trends on a more advanced future cooperation on education policies and common curricula that involve a European angle too.

The Need to Act

It is necessary to understand that the connection the European youth has to the EU, has an immediate effect on the EU as a whole (Asderaki, 2017). Young people are the future of the Union and hold a great responsibility regarding reaching the long-term goals of the Union in many policies. Over the last years, there has been a great increase budget-wise regarding youth, research & development, innovation and education, proving that the EU is ready to invest in its future (Council of the EU, 2021).

Certainly, there are plenty of university departments throughout the continent, concerning European studies, but this is not enough, as higher education is focused only on people who choose it and not open to the public as part of their core education during their mandatory years, leaving the majority of the youth population cut out, since according to the latest Eurostat (2022b) findings, only a 40% of the youth attains higher education in general.

How can European identity be enhanced? – Proposal

In order to be an active member of European society, the youth need firstly to assimilate how the EU works and what it represents. Since this is not knowledge obtained by the established education systems, there is room for the EU to provide the Member States with new proposals towards this aim.

Europamobil is a project that serves exactly this goal and can be utilized by the EU as an official tool for its youth and education policies. This project was established by the Geshangen Institute in Germany in 2009 and is now funded by the Brandenburg state as well as the European Solidarity Corps. Twenty students from all around Europe have annually the chance to create a team that travels to a selected region of Germany, France or Poland for a month-long trip and visits participant - schools, intending to have workshops and discussions around the EU (Stiftung Geshangen, n.d.). This team brings the pupils many steps closer to the Union as they get the chance not only to meet students

from other Member States, but also to have fruitful dialogues and to access information about the opportunities that they, as Europeans, are freely given.

It is suggested that Europamobil should broaden its scope of action and become adopted by the European Youth Capital initiative by being a part of the events and activities organized to support it. Thus, each year pupils from a different region of Europe will have the opportunity to benefit from an interactive way of teaching about their second home, the European Union, instead of the project to solely involve these 3 countries.

Legal Basis & Funding

As the Union strongly declares with the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy as the leading framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027 based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018, youth participation in democratic life needs to be fostered, social and civic engagement need to be supported and uninterrupted access to the necessary resources to take part in society need to be guaranteed (Council of the EU, 2018).

The aforementioned proposal lies within the responsibilities given to the EU for supporting purposes of the education policy (Art.165/TFEU) along with the youth policy (Art.166/TFEU), as it does not enforce a whole new curriculum to be followed by everyone, it simply assists the Union to achieve its goals towards increasing youth engagement.

As far as the funding of this project is concerned, given that it has been smoothly running for the last 14 years, it has already been worked out and the European Solidarity Corps have already included it in their budget-allocation, meaning that the shift in the Europamobil's working area does not face unprecedented financial obstacles. In addition, there is already established expertise on the functioning of the program, which is a great asset.

Regarding the selection process of the schools participating, the voluntary application of the interested schools at the European Youth Capital area is proposed, for the sake of gatekeeping the freedom of choice and participation.

Conclusions

Bearing in mind that this is solely a simple suggestion for boosting the presence of the European Union at schools, there is yet much space left for enhancing the European youth engagement. Education policy remains a national competence in which the EU only assists, but this does not erase the fact that some mutual steps from the Member States could prove to be strongly beneficial.

Undoubtedly, over the past decade some major initiatives have been adopted, such as the European Education Area (EEA) that is still to be fully established. Even though the actions suggested initially, both regarding the general framework of the EEA and the proposal presented in this document, might seem slightly hesitant, they are in fact imperative for the sake of a smooth transition to an augmented cooperation in education in the following years.

The suggestion made on this paper, steps on concrete achievements of the youth and education policies, such as the approved curriculum of the European Schools Institution while it also attempts to generate fruitful discussions concerning a more organized form of teaching about the European Union in primary and secondary education, apart from higher education.

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