2018

Youth in Action.
The youth policies as a tool for building of security community in the Western Balkans.

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MSc. International Public Management and Policy

8/16/2018

Word count: 24,562

Summary

This thesis researches whether the EU youth programmes had an impact on the formation of trust and sense of belonging among the civil societies in the Western Balkans, analysed through the theory of security community. It was expected that the youth programmes, namely the YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+ Youth in Action, are going to foster the community-building in the Western Balkans, by setting the foundation for a security community in the region and by contributing for further integration in the European Union's community. To test this expectation, the three-tier framework of Adler and Barnett (1998) was adopted and further expanded to construct an operational framework, on the basis of which the three youth programmes were examined and evaluated. Qualitative evidence was gathered from documents and reports published by the European Commission, from national and regional sources, as well as from conducting ad-hoc interviews. The evidence was consequently analysed by pattern matching to test whether the structural and process variables from the framework are present. In addition the logic model of Yin was applied to evaluate the efficiency of the implementation and the produced outcomes (2014).

As a result, the content analysis revealed that the programmes provided all theoretical conditions-social learning, institutions and organisations, transaction density and knowledge for establishing the social fabric and community as the cornerstones of the security community theory. Although the outcomes of trust and collective identity are still in nascent phase, the programmes have definitely had a positive influence on the latter by promoting solidarity and the European identity. Thus, the community-building in the Western Balkans, has been established.

Acknowledgments

The writing of this thesis has been a true challenge. It is the first time I write in my academic experience such a research, therefore I had to learn a lot. Despite the many challenges on the way, I realised that we learn the most when faced with difficulties.

Luckily, I was not alone in this process. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Koen Stapelbroek for having the patience to guide me when I was insecure. I am also grateful to my friend Maria Tumpalova for giving me the inspiration and courage to pursue my interest in the Western Balkans and the EU youth policies. Last but not least, I would like to thank to my colleagues Ilse Groot, Daniela Ramos, Diana Barbosa and Ambra di Zitti who deserve my special gratitude for always supporting me.

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List of abbreviations

BiH- Bosnia and Herzegovina

FYROM- The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

YiH- Youth in Action

Erasmus+YiA- Erasmus+ Youth in Action

SALTO SEE- SALTO-Youth South East Europe Resource Centre

SEE- South East Europe

CSO-Civil society organisation

EU-European Union

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I.   Introduction

Otto von Bismarck once had said: "If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans" (Churchill, 1923, p.96). And he was not wrong- the Balkans wars and more recently- the Yugoslav war confirmed his remark. In fact, the Balkans have rich history of conflicts and wars, characterized by ethnic intolerance and severe violence, and known for the dissolution of Yugoslavia's federal union and declaring independent states- Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, which only reinforced the existing ethnic identities and the distrust (Branković & al., 2017). Balkans are called the poweder keg of Europe for a reason. One of the reasons for this is the ethnic type of nationhood in the Balkans, which has been cultivated by the political elites using language and discourses for glorious past, historic injustice when establishing the geographical boundaries and genuine national culture (Stamenova, 2017). These strong sentiments are still present today which comes to say that the region has a highly complex ground in which the historic and ethnic intricacies make the process of creating perpetual stability difficult (Brancovich & al., 2017). Considering the ongoing efforts of the European Union (EU) to integrate the region, the abovementioned conditions pose a challenge especially towards building a sense of regional identity[1]. This regional identity is seen as the main condition of the regional integration, since the issues of interstates' distrust, prejudices and fear are still salient.

Power and interests are the factors that have determined the dominating state-centric and top-down approaches towards the foreign policy and peace building in the past. As the realist and liberalist school of thoughts dominated the international relations, it was perceived that peace is a matter only of high politics and it is in the hands of the states, the political elites and the international organisations.

Contrastingly, there is an alternative view to the top-down and materialist approach, which breaks the traditional line of assumption that the building of peace takes place only on the highest levels of political governance and consequently is being posed on the society level. This approach is more reflectivist as it interprets reality as a social construct, driven by collective understandings and norms, which emerge from social interaction (Wendt, 1998). In given situation, states or even societies can construct shared identities and norms leading to a stable peace (Adler & Barnett, 1998).

Moreover, an example of this alternative perspective is found in the work of Karl Deutsch who introduced his communicative model and theoretical assumptions for building *security communities*. What is meant by a security community is the integration of a group of people to a certain degree in which a *sense of belonging* has been established and as such has resulted in creating expectations of *peaceful change* among the nations (Deutsch & al., 1957). This *sense of community* or 'we-feeling', as

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[1] The meaning of the regional identity which this thesis has adopted, is further elaborated in Chapter IV.

Deutsch calls it, is the crucial condition for diminishing the possibility of violent conflict and further for the functioning of supranational institutions (Adler & Barnett, 1998). According to Deutsch (1957), this process of building community is not exclusively the responsibility of the political elites but is also a grassroots activity associated with interaction and social learning on society level.

Looking at the current international relations, scholars find that strong examples for existing security communities are the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (Laporte, 2012). In this context, the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies aim at building stability and security in its surroundings through the expanding of its security community (European Commission, 2018). One of these cases on the agenda is the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2018). To achieve its goal of integrating the Western Balkans in the European community, the European Union has put forward, apart from the economic and political conditions, a focus on enhancing regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations (European Commission, 2018). In this context, many scholars have reached the conclusion that a crucial step to achieve Balkan integration into the European community, would be to create a regional identity or 'Euro-Atlantic identification', which would lead to improvement of the interethnic relations and security in the Balkans (Koneska, 2007; Dreiack, 2016).

Among the tools, which the EU have designed for this purpose, are the youth policies focusing on the education and potential of the young people (European Commission, 2018). This tool is also a reflection of the shift in the international discourse on peace building and the role of youth. Young people are no longer seen solely as a target or a problem, but also as agents of change. The international community sees the young people as the key solution for creating stability and peace in conflict areas by fostering their access to decision-making and forums to raise their voice. For this purpose, youth is being empowered through investments in its education and peace-learning, as well as in perceiving economic stability for securing employment. It is also well acknowledged that the engagement of the youth organisations is crucial. Their efforts to eliminate the stereotypical thinking and to consolidate peace by dialogue and active participation in the community are significant contribution for building social cohesion and inclusion as a counterforce for violence (Simpson, 2018).

In the EU enlargement policy and efforts for building stability in the Western Balkans, the youth importance is explicitly outlined in the Berlin Process that was initiated in 2014 by the German chancellor Angela Merkel, as an instrument for fostering integration and regional cooperation (Lilyanova, 2016). To accomplish these objectives and for building of trust, the EU has set as a priority the youth empowerment (Lilyanova, 2016). In this context, various programmes have been adopted and central role was given to the Erasmus + programme, under the portfolio of the European Commission, and its predecessors the YOUTH and Youth in Action programmes. Further goals, highlighted by the European Commission (2009), are the inclusion of youth in the labour market, promoting active

citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity through increased learning and mobility, as well as creating opportunities for young people. The youth policies, as it will be argued further in the thesis, have great potential for strengthening the civil society and thus enhancing the good relations between ethnic groups. This can be recognised also in the EU's youth strategy which focuses on the young people in the Member States and the Partnering countries, and the aim is to promote participation in democratic life in Europe (European Commission, 2009).

1.1.   Selection of case

To explore the effects of the youth policies as an instrument for enhancing the construction of a security community in the Western Balkans, three cases illustrating the EU's youth initiatives are chosen, namely the YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus +Youth in Action programmes. To justify the choice of these programmes, the focus on the youth field will be explained next.

The youth programmes are chosen as cases due to the high potential of the youth engagement, acknowledged by scholars as well as by policy makers. Much can be learned about the political effects and the impact of the youth participation in the community. There are significant gaps in the research in the field and a lot of prospective for further findings. Scholars have not been able to focus in depth on the potential political effects of the youth engagement and have not been successful in broadening the potential impact of the phenomenon on regional level. The research would develop understanding on the matter of integration process and creating peace in a traumatized region. In addition, the specific programmes are considered due to their main role in EU's youth policies. In the context of the Western Balkans, the YOUTH, Youth in Action (YiA) and Erasmus +Youth in Action (Erasmus +YiA) programmes contain specific projects with the aim of building stability in the region by supporting the development of youth work, promoting multicultural awareness, tolerance and solidarity among young people. Moreover, the Commission's strategy for the EU's engagement in the Western Balkans envisages that the youth programmes would support the European Union's effort towards the stabilisation of the Western Balkan region as well as good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation (European Commission, 2018). Lastly, the region has been chosen due to researcher's personal interest in the Balkans, deriving from her place of origin, but also because of her strong cultural connection with the region.

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1.2.   Research question.

Out of the above, the following research question has been formulated:

Can the EU's youth initiatives in the Western Balkans be understood as an application of the constructivist security community theory?

To answer this question, the following two groups of sub-questions will guide the research:

1. Does the EU perceive the youth policies as an integration tool?
2. How does the Union look at the Western Balkans in relation to its own security?
3. What does the EU want to achieve through the youth policies in the Western Balkans?
4. Do the youth policies provide the conditions for building a security community?
5. Do the youth participation and exchanges result in constructing collective identity in the Western Balkans and intra-regional trust?

1.3.   Research aim and objective.

This thesis aims at testing the potential effects of the EU youth policies on the construct of security community in the Western Balkans. The youth activism will be tested whether it possess the ability to influence the process of establishing a sense of belonging and trust in a post-conflict region and ultimately its impact on the integration of that region into a wider community are the directions of the research. By narrowing the case to the programmes focused on the Western Balkans, the research would also prove whether the youth programmes can be seen firstly, as grassroots activity for establishing peace and secondly, as an integration practice. Thus, the objective is to empirically test whether the youth programmes provide the prescribed theoretical conditions for enhancing the community-building process in the Western Balkans. To accomplish this, the three cases of youth programmes will be researched, namely YOUTH, Youth in Action, and Erasmus + Youth in Action with their sub-projects, covering the timeframe of 2000 to 2017. The starting year 2000 is set because since then, the Western Balkans' were able to participate in the youth programmes as partnering countries of the EU. The time frame is set until 2017 due to the availability of data up to this period. The new Erasmus +: Youth in Action programme was initiated in 2014 until 2020 and up to this moment the available data is limited, therefore the data on this programme will show only partial results, however it is considered useful to observe a pattern or evolution in the programmes.

1.4.   Relevance of the research

The relevance of social science research is generally divided in theoretical and societal dimensions. These two will be developed bellow by incorporating them in the cases selected in this thesis.

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1.4.1. Theoretical relevance

Achieving theoretical relevance in a research project helps improving the theoretical understanding of the cases under analysis (Lehnert, Miller & Wonka, 2007). Therefore, the dialogue between the theory and the data, gathered from the analysis of the selected cases, contributes for the expanding of the current state of knowledge (Toshkov, 2014). The exploration of Karl Deutsch's approach towards the international relations and building on its operationalisation of achieving stable peace through the youth policies, seen as a social integration practice, is the main objective of this thesis. The combination of the constructivist concept of identity and the liberal assumption of communities of individuals in the security community theory is worth to be researched. The expected application of the youth participation to the theory will have double relevance. First, it will serve as further contribution to Deutsch's concept of security communities and will improve the theoretical operationalisation in the theory, related to the community building process. This would be accomplished by adapting the framework for analysis on social level. Second, it will fill in the research gap in the field of youth participation, particularly on its effects on community level, and as result, will contribute for the expanding of the theoretical understanding of youth policies on how they could influence the process of constructing a community.

1.4.2. Societal relevance.

Matthias Lehnert, Bernhard Miller and Arndt Wonka (2007) argue that to have a societal relevant research, three goals need to be achieved. First, a research needs to be able to develop an understanding of a social and political phenomenon, which affects people. Secondly, a research needs to relate to explicitly specified evaluative standards. Lastly, a research needs to be able to formulate policy advice resulting on the basis of the research findings (Lehnert, Miller & Wonka, 2007). The case of the youth engagement in the Balkans have been selected for two main reasons. Firstly, the integration of the region is a current priority of the European Union, as well as the focus on good neighbourly relations and the Youth strategy. Recently, the European Commission released the EU strategy for the enlargement perspective and the Union's engagement with the Western Balkans and the youth participation is part of the integration strategy (European Commission, 2018). Therefore, examining the conditions for the future accession is of high social relevance. Moreover, the research would foster the link between EU's youth and integration policy in general and particularly in the Western Balkans. Ultimately, the research's findings would serve as a proof of the political impact of the youth policies and further, as a source for political advice.

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II.   Literature review.

This chapter will present a review of the most influential research in the field of youth participation in order to explore what are the potential applications for the constructivist theory of security community. As the concept of a 'vibrant civil society' is a highly important concept for the youth policies, as well as for the social integration and peace building, it will be presented in the first paragraph. Next, the definition of youth engagement will be built by exploring the various models that have been constructed. Lastly, the chapter will summarise the researchers' conclusions on the effect of youth activism on the society with the limitation that further research on the matter is required.

2.1.   Peace and civil society.

It is widely accepted that an important condition for establishing stable peace in post-conflict and highly traumatised regions, is the presence of a vibrant civil society (Devic, 2006; Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006). Practitioners and scholars use different approaches to define the concept of civil society. Some define it as an independent sector like the political or economic ones, others- as the space between these sectors (Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006). Paffenholz and Spurk synthesise all these approaches by defining the civil society as –

The sector of voluntary action within institutional forms that are distinct from those of the state, family and market, keeping in mind that in practice the boundaries between these sectors are often complex and blurred (2006, p.2).

When talking about civil society and its role in matters such as integration, community building and preserving peace, the concept of the *social capital* could help understand their interlinkage. Originally, this term was introduced by Robert Putnam who found that the relationship between strong networks of citizen participation leads to positive institutional performance (Boix and Posner, 1996). There is a lack of a single definition of the social capital, however a widely used one is- "networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups"(OECD, 2002, p.v). Moreover, the networks norms of reciprocity and trust are fostered among the members of community associations by their experience of social interaction and cooperation, thus creating a good social capital in which there are strong bridging ties including different ethnic and social groupings (Boix and Posner, 1996; Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006). Therefore, the function of community building is essential. Also, the civil society is seen as able to influence the decision making of the governments, as well as to improve the relations between different groupings (Cubitt, 2013).

Nonetheless, in post- conflict ethnic regions, political elites often use civil society as an instrument to enforce ethnic discourses and consequently apply violence towards other ethnic groups (Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006). Building a stronger and more aware civil society, with high social capital

and empowered individuals, could contribute for stabilising the traumatised regions and as a result will lead to establishing a stable peace. Scholars and international organisations have acknowledged the potential of young people for driving peaceful changes in the conflict regions (Schell & Faucon, 2001; Hartley, 2014). To build more understanding of the potential of youth to affect the political and social processes, the next paragraphs will explore the research made so far on the subject.

2.2.   Youth policy revised

Much attention has recently been given to the field of youth policies and youth agency. Scholars have shifted the perspective towards young people from vulnerable group in risk of poverty, marginalisation or situated in conflict environment, to potential agents of change (Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera, 2006). Historic students'riots, example of which are the protests in the USA against the Vietnam War in the 1970's and the Velvet Revolution in 1989 in the former Czechoslovakia motivated the research of the role of youth in the society in the past. However, the potential positive impact on society of the young people's activism has just been acknowledged. International organisations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union have recognised in their youth strategies young people as specific resource and agents, rather than as a problem to be dealt with. As a result, the international organisations have adopted a narrative about empowering youth and their inclusion and involvement in decision-making, encouraging participation and active citizenship through their youth policies and strategies (European Commission, 2015).

Nevertheless, scholars acknowledge that despite the vast literature on youth, there is a lack of systematic research on the effects of the young people's activism (Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera, 2006; Gutierrez, 2006; Barber, 2009). There is a research gap in the field, since the scholars, interested in the matter have not provided in-depth analysis on the political effects and impact on the community. Moreover, the area of analysis so far has been limited to local communities and there has not been a significant attempt to research the potential impact on societies and the ability of youth empowerment for building bridges among them.

2.3.   Definition of youth engagement.

There are various explanations of what the youth participation means. Terry Barber (2009) offers a critical comparative overview of the participatory theories, arguing that they are mainly "ill- defined and contested". The author presents different models of representation to build understanding of what participation is and makes a connection with building a sense of citizenship through this process. The author does not provide a comprehensive definition of participation except that he describes it as an active process of including youth in decision-making (Barber, 2009). The value of Barber's research is

that he correlates the well-being of youth related to the emerging sense of citizenship. He assumes that enhancing active citizenship could create more stable civil societies and would even eradicate negative phenomena like xenophobia or violence.

A comprehensive definition of youth participation is offered by Lorraine M. Gutiérrez and Barry Checkoway (2006). The authors define youth participation as a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives. (Gutiérrez & Checkoway, 2006). Further, young people organise themselves in groups for social and political action, planning programs and advocating, raising concerns and educating others. Gutiérrez and Checkoway found that youth engagement in the mentioned activities, have the potential to produce outcomes on multiple levels, thus performing the role of *agents of change* (2006). Such changes that the youth produced included strengthening the social development, building organisational capacity by gaining personal confidence, social connectedness, civic competencies, leadership development, and creating changes in the environment. The emphasis here is put on the effect on youth, rather than on the relation between the youth participation and political change.

Further examples of the self-efficacy approach can be found in the work of Medina, Messias & al. (2006), who construct their own youth empowerment model. The authors emphasize the importance of providing opportunities to adolescents to develop leadership skills and to engage especially in decision-making. The central focus is on sharing power between youth and adults and engaging the young people in the community by building awareness and commitment for improving the conditions in the community. Such opportunities, as observed by Medina, Messias & al. (2006), promote collective- and political-efficacy, resulting in engaging of youth in activities advocating for community change.

This self-efficacy approach is also adopted by Ben Kirshner (2007), who analyses youth activism as a context for learning and development. In his work the author claims that the collective responsibility, emerging from the youth groups' activism, influences political changes as the collective efforts breaks the distances between policy makers and youth. Thus, young people are more able to raise their voices on public matters. Kirshner further observes that by trying to solve collective problems, adolescents build identities of powerful civic actors. Moreover, framing social problems as collective responsibility could lead to forming collective identity (Kirshner, 2007). This observation could be found in the research of Bernstein (1997) who states that identity is an end-goal of collective action in that activists may challenge stigmatized identities, seek recognition for new identities or deconstruct restrictive social categories (Bernstein, 1997, as cited in: Lewis-Charp, Cao Yu, Soukamneuth, 2006). Natasha Watkins, Reed Larson and Patrick J. Sullivan (2007) further aim to prove in their research that the process of

learning leads to the elimination of the causal relation between ethnic differentiation and stereotyping among youth (Watkins, Larson & Sullivan, 2007). They researched a community youth activism programme in the USA which was targeting Latino and African American young people. The authors observed in their case study that through critical learning and intensive interaction, the young people developed mutual relations and become aware of each other's differences, thus being able to reflect on their own attitude.

The effect of building a collective identity and changing the perspective from ethnic stereotypes to building awareness for the difference of the others, is crucial in societies torn by ethnic conflicts example of which are the Western Balkans (Pratto, F.; Žeželj, I.; Maloku, E.; Turjacanin, V. and Brankovic, M., 2017). To this end, in their research, Felicia Pratto and al. express positive expectations for the future of the interethnic relations in the region especially outlining the role of youth (Pratto, F. & al., 2007). In this sense, youth participation and the process of learning are seen as bridges for overcoming the drawbacks from the social categorisation among ethnicities. The importance of intergroup communication for building trust between different ethnicities is outlined in the "common in-group identity model". The model is researched in the work of Samuel L. Gaertner, Mary C. Rust, John F. Dovidio, Betty A. Bachman, Phyllis A. Anastasio (1994). The authors aim to prove that it is possible for groups to overcome biases and distrust of social categorisation. They observe a possible mechanism for accomplishing this by achieving cooperative and interpersonal interaction, as well by spreading supportive norms as they create conditions for shifting the biased cognitive representation and group differentiation from "us" and "them" to "we". (Gaertner, Rust & al. ,1994).

2.4.   The community impact approach

The second group of scholars shift the attention from the individual development to the impact on community level (see Ginwright and James, 2002; Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota, 2006; Zeldin, S., Camino, L. and Calvert, M.; Christens, B. and Dolan, T., 2011). Despite that, as mentioned before, there is research gap in the analysis of the political and community level impact, important conclusions can be drawn from the work of such scholars.

Brian D. Christens and Tom Dolan (2011) focused their study on the youth organizing initiative in the USA by using qualitative data. The study illustrates that the observed model for youth organisation has been effective in producing impacts at multiple levels, because it has led to youth development, community development, and social change. The initiative has been able to produce community-level impacts, including new programme implementation, policy change, and institution building (Christens and Dolan, 2011). The authors argue that grassroots community organising could have the potential to alter the local political cultures (Christens and Dolan, 2011).

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Ginwright, Noguera and Cammarota (2006) argue that young people have the capacity to produce knowledge and thus influence the public perceptions. After gathering several case studies, the authors conclude that youth resistance, community change and civic engagement contribute to more effective and democratic policy-making in local communities. In this context, Daniel HoSang (2006) stresses the role of the perceptions of young people as key in shaping local policy because they possess the ability to contest the general public's and policy-makers' definitions of community issues. He focuses on youth organisations and their role in challenging the dominant political discourses and the political use of ethnic contradictions to enforce racialization of young people (HoSang, 2006).

An empirical case, proving the effectiveness of youth participation in diminishing cultural stereotypes and connecting societies, is presented in the research of Mehmet Nurettin Alabay and Melih Rustu Calikoglu (2013). The authors put a central focus on how societies communicate between each other and contest the "otherness" while embracing the collective identities in their socialisation. What their research has found is that by the EU education programmes, such as Youth in Action and Lifelong Learning, participants from the EU and from Turkey have been able to overcome the stereotypes and prejudices amongst each other, and, as a result, have built intercultural dialogue and trust. The evidence for this conclusion was extracted from personal stories of the participants from both sides. The observations from this case research raises the question whether it is possible to observe these outcomes in a different case and even replicate the process, not only between the EU and a neighbourhood countries, but also on a local level in the Western Balkan region.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the research in the youth participation field is that young people empowerment could enhance the development of a good social capital. It means that through intensive interaction and learning by experiencing, the communities could build bridges among each other. This would entail building tolerance by overcoming the negative stereotyping, creating awareness of the other and of one's own attitude. It could be expected that through the process of learning, self-development and interaction, youth can overcome even the distrust in communities where the social categorisation is salient issue. Consequently, the preconditions for reaching resilience and cohesion at the social level, for communities which want to be integrated within wider community, would be on place. On the other hand, the active civil society in these communities will be able to influence even the political elites and moreover the decision-making.

III.   Theoretical framework.

This chapter explains the theoretical assumptions and paradigms in depth that are argued to build a security community, and secondly explores the three-tier framework- the only existing model for researching security communities. Nevertheless, some of the drawbacks of the theory that are related to the lack of a formalised operationalisation suitable for social research will be outlined. Consequently, the recognised theoretical variables will be elaborated further in chapter IV. Lastly, the argument of the application of the case of the youth participation to the theory will be laid out, hypothesizing the expected ability of the youth policies to match the theoretical assumptions.

3.1.   "Security community" and the relation with the international relations theories.

To find the right approach towards examining the processes of stabilisation and reconciliation, which are ongoing in the region, one must look at the whole spectrum of explanations for the building of peace. Why have conflict occurred and how it could be resolved and how a peace can be established, are questions for which scholars in international relations have found different answers. The realist school of thought assumes that states are self-interested and are in a state of anarchy. Given these conditions, they are in a constant struggle for power and only when there is an established balance of power, either under the hegemony of one, or under alliances, then temporary peace could be established (Wendt, 1992). From the neo-liberal institutionalist perspective in the state of anarchy states can still cooperate to avoid conflict driven by relative gains of the lack of war. Therefore, states, driven by material gains construct institutions to encourage cooperation and to further ensure their mutual interest in survival (Moravcsik, 1997). The neoliberal school of thought also assumes that cooperation could occur as result of iterated interaction between states, leading to stable peace under the conditions of "the shadow of the future" as argued by Kenneth Oye (1985).

It is evident that power and interests are the factors that determine the dominating state-centric and top-down approaches towards the foreign policy. Contrastingly, there is an alternative view which disagrees with the assumption that the building of peace takes place only in the highest levels of political governance and consequently is being posed on the society level. Scholars have introduced a more reflectivist way of approaching the international relations as they interpret reality as a social construct, driven by collective understandings and norms, which emerge from social interaction (Wendt, 1998). Therefore, the international actors, whether states, organisations or civil society agents are embedded in a structure in which under the proper conditions there is a possibility of constructing shared identities and norms leading to a stable peace (Adler & Barnett, 1998).

An example for this alternative perspective is found in the work of Karl Deutsch who introduced his communicative model and the theoretical assumptions for building security communities. A security

community is the integration of a group of people to a certain degree in which a sense of belonging has been established and as such has resulted in creating expectations of peaceful change among the nations (Deutsch & al., 1957). This means that there is "real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically but will settle their disputes in some other way" (Deutsch & al., 1957, p.6). This sense of community or 'we-feeling', as Deutsch calls it, is the crucial condition for diminishing the possibility of violent conflict and further for the functioning of supranational institutions (Adler & Barnett, 1998). According to Deutsch (1957), this process of building community is not exclusively the responsibility of the political elites but is also a grassroots activity associated with interaction and social learning on society level. A crucial condition is the presence of a *sense of belonging* that would halt the governments from using violence.

In relation to the rest of the international relations theories, the *security community* comes as an opposition to the realist approach to security as it suggests that states can eliminate war in their relations not through traditional ways of balance of power or cooperation but by creating *sense of community* and *trust* and form expectations for stable peace. (By?) Adopting the community approach, the theory can be related to the sociological liberalism and also to what Hedley Bull conceptualized as *world society*, build on common norms, rules, and identities held by individuals across the system (Buzan, 1993).

The security community theory was for long neglected by scholars, until the 1990's when two constructivist-Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett resurrected it. Adler and Barnett recognised the *security community* concept in the social constructivist assumption that politics could be changed by shifts in national and transnational forces (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Instead of accepting that identities are externally given and cannot be changed, like rationalists do, social constructivism argues that the identities are endogenous to the process of interaction and as such could be changed (Wendt, 1992). As a social structure, the latter consists of shared knowledge, material resources and practices, and therefore it could be transformed trough communication and exchanging knowledge (Wendt, 1992).

3.2.   The concept of "security community".

As it was stated above, Deutsch defined the *security community* as a group of states which became integrated in the level that they do not anticipate any conflict between them (Deutsch & al. 1957). To this end, it is expected that it will be more likely that interstate or even intercommunity cooperation will take place. The *pluralistic security community,* in which states have kept their sovereignty in comparison to the amalgamated community which has formed a federation, have three crucial characteristics: compatibility of core values derived from common institutions, mutual responsiveness which is a reflection of the mutual identification, and a sense of "we"-ness. The presence of all these demonstrates that states are integrated to the point that they entertain *dependable expectations of*

peaceful change meaning that they will not expect future war, but a peaceful resolution of any conflict (Adler & Barnett, 1997). Although Deutsch focused mainly on the political level in his empirical testing, this thesis argues that the building community on the societal level is equally important. Moreover, it follows the recommendation made of Joseph Nye (1968) to disaggregate the concept of integration into three aspects - economic, political and social integration - and explore each one separately. In this sense, research on the last aspect - social integration is pursued and is understood as the idea of Deutsch (1966) for developing of sense of community and Nye's international society. Highly corresponding to this research's objectives is the social integration model of Eppler, Anders & Tuntschew, which is based on trans-border interactions, emergence of communicative space and sense of community, operationalised as European identity (2016).

3.3.   The condition of "sense of community".

Deutsch's pioneering theory can be distinguished further by the rest of the international relations approached by the understanding of anarchy, war, and amalgamation (Merritt and Russett, 1981). Influenced by Hugo Grotius theoretical views, Deutsch argued that no direct relationship exists between anarchy and war, but ineffective or premature efforts to mitigate anarchy could cause war (Merritt and Russett, 1981). Deutsch's belief is that in the conditions of *security community* the possibility of a violent conflict could be eliminated as a result of integration and developing a *sense of community*. Furthermore, Deutsch focused on the interaction between communities, rather than between states. He perceived worlds of people, communities, or *identitive* groupings, characterized by "we and they" perceptions and relationships (Puchala, 1981). These sentiments between individuals, the way they perceive each other and the degree of mutual trust, define their political relations as the emergence of those sentiments would restrain the national governments of using force for resolving any conflict (Puchala,1981). Under certain conditions of continuity and high volumes of transaction, Deutsch (1957) assumes that in time the intercommunity interactions and social learning will lead to the integration into larger communities.

Despite that Deutsch recognises two levels of socialisation- the political and the social, this research will focus on the latter, as it aims to adopt bottom-up approach and prove that grassroots activities are crucial for establishing peace.

As already mentioned, Deutsch strongly emphasized the formation of a *sense of community* or the ability of societies to think more in terms of "we" or, with other words, a shared image of self. The way to acquire these is through process of *social learning* which means the adoption of collective understandings of matters such as security, society, politics and economy (Adler & Barnett, 1998, p.54). As Mouritzen outlines, this learning takes places away from the "rulers" in the civil society enhanced

by intensive interactions among the population, thus making the process bottom-up (2003). Furthermore, the author confirms that the micro-foundations of the initiation of "we"-feeling are the confidence-building measures taken on the grassroots level of individual, professional and regional non-governmental organisations (Mouritzen, 2003). Therefore, the civil society organisations (CSOs) have crucial role for developing the ability of mutual predictions of behavior, mutual consideration, partial identification in terms of self-images and interests Adler & Barnett, 1998).

One factor that Deutsch recognised as having a negative effect on the mutual responsiveness or trust is the presence of multiple ethnicities in the societies. This brings the issue of ethnic or linguistic differentiation or the process of particularization based on language or ethnic background (Deutsch & al., 1957). To this end, having in mind the various ethnic identities in the Western Balkans, it could be argued that this ethnic differentiation comes as an enormous obstacle to the convergence of the identities and the mutual responsiveness which would lead to more trust, prediction of behaviour as well as expectation for cooperation and as a consequence- stable peace.

3.4.   Civil society and the security community

As stated before, the civil society is a crucial factor in the process of forming security communities. Emanuel Adler argues that a crucial condition for constructing the collective identity is the presence of strong civil society as it creates networks for promoting *community bonds* (1997). The nature of this network is defined by the flows of private transactions in conjunction with trans-national organisations such as the European Union. In addition, Adler assumes that through these flows, shared believes and norms are being spread, leading to producing a common identity (1997). The research of Suzette R. Grillot and Rebecca J. Cruise (2014) emphasizes the necessity of building a second dimension of analysis, based on the social level and the sense of community among the public. All this comes to say that in order to build security communities, a crucial step is to form a strong social capital. As it was illustrated in the literature review, a possible tool for achieving this is the youth engagement as it holds the potential of forming collective identity, deconstructing prejudices and even alters the political cultures.

This thesis has adopted the bottom-up approach to argue that the process of forming the social fabric on the society level is an equally important condition as the political practices. It even takes a step further assuming that the interaction networks in civil society could influence the political elite, which will lead to the building of a community. Further, it is expected that the YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus + Youth in Action programmes by enhancing the learning and communication process in the civil society and engaging the CSOs, would have positive impact on the emergence of sense of trust and "we"- feeling.

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3.5.   The three tiers framework.

To test this expectation, an initial step that must be taken is to operationalise the theoretical assumptions laid out in Deutsch's theory. To achieve this, the framework, constructed by Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998), will be used (see Figure 1). This framework is chosen as the main guiding model as it is the only operationalisation of the Deutsch's theory and provides a procedural structure of the community building theory.

Having said this, it must be outlined that both the operationalisation, offered by Deutsch and the three tiers framework build by Adler and Barnett (1998), lack formalisation and do not provide the necessary tools for a social science research. Therefore, to overcome this limitation and given the fact that there is no other operationalisation approach to the theory, the three tiers will be further elaborated, by expanding the understanding of the variables using the most relevant empirical and theoretical explanations of each variable. The first tier which Adler and Barnett use in their framework, contains the precipitating conditions related to the factors that have influenced the states to reach out to each other and cooperate. The second tier consists of structural variables such as knowledge and power, on the one hand, and process variables – transactions, organisations and social learning, on the other. The third tier presents the outcomes of the positive relation between the process and the structural variables, namely the construct of mutual trust and collective identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998).

Tier One
Precipitating conditions
• Change in technology, demography, economics, the environment
• Development of new interpretations of social reality
• External threats

Tier Two
Factors conducive to the development of mutual trust and collective identity

Structure: Process:
Power   Transactions
Knowledge   Organizations
                            Social learning

Tier Three
Necessary conditions of dependable expectations of peaceful change

Mutual trust   Collective identity

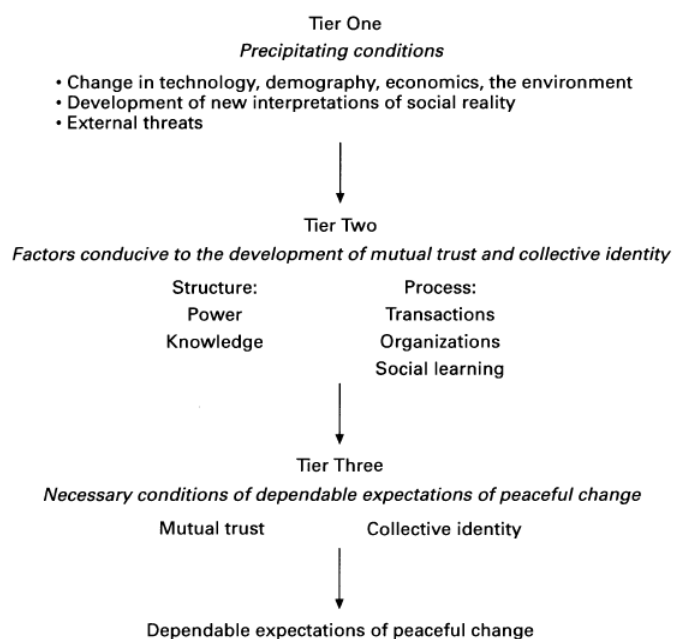Dependable expectations of peaceful change

Figure 1. The development of security community. Adopted and retrieved from Adler and Barnett (1998, p. 38)

The research will focus on all tiers. The first tier will be applied to investigate whether the precipitating conditions, necessary for initiation of the integration process, are in place in the Western Balkans and

the last two, more specifically, will be used as compass to indicate whether the youth policies can be seen as an instrument for driving the process of building a community. Thus, the next paragraph will explain the variables set in the tiers.

The community building process involves the successful interaction between the structural variables of knowledge and power, and the process ones- transactions, social learning and the organisations and institutions. Transaction is defined as a bounded communication between one actor and another. The more intensive and extensive transactions are related to the concept of *dynamic density*, the more quantity and diversity of transactions that go on within society (Adler & Barnett, 1998). The scholars argue that transactions have to be evaluated for qualitative and quantitative growth as this shows the level of *dynamic density,* which according to Emile Durkheim, is able to create and transform social facts (Adler & Barnett, 1998). As a consequence of the transactions, changes in the individual and collective understandings and values are expected. Secondly, important characteristics of the transactions are their function of developing collective learning, which comes often in institutionalised settings. The latter helps for diffusing the knowledge across states and generations. As Adler and Barnett argue, the organisations have an important role in spreading and defining the meanings and values, encouraging the states to perceive themselves as a part of a region and finally to create trust-building practices (Adler and Barnett, 1998). In the case of the youth policies, the main role is played by the European Union and its partner organisations either part of the institutional architecture of the Union or acting as its partners.

Another element that must be present in the social learning process is the liberal values. Their importance is extensively elaborated by Adler and Barnett. They argue that the liberal ideas are more likely to promote collective identity and trust as well as strong civil society as they promote interpenetration of societies and exchanges of people and practices (Adler & Barnett, 1998). The social learning represents the capacity and motivation of social actors to manage and even transform reality by changing their beliefs of the material and social world and their identities. These process variables are in relation with the structural variables of knowledge and power. The former is seen as the inter-subjective meanings and social constructs and the power, lying in those who are constructing these meanings (Adler and Barnett, 1998). More detailed exploration of the concepts will be presented in the next chapter. Ultimately, the expected outcome resulting from the positive interaction between the structural and process variables leads to the emergence of dependable expectations of peaceful change. The latter has to be analyzed through the two building elements- collective identity and trust (Adler & Barnett, 1998). As argued by Adler and Barnett, stable expectations for peace can come from actors sharing identities and interests.

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IV.   Further exploration of the variables. Building expectations.

Despite the values of the explanation of Adler and Barnett of the different concepts included in the three tiers, namely transactions, social learning, organisations, knowledge, trust and collective identity, it is not considered sufficient for this research to extract indicators for social research. Thus, this thesis finds it necessary to further explore the different theoretical approaches to the various concepts relying upon several theories. The social learning theory is used to explore the multiple dimensions of the social learning as a system of practices (Wenger, 2001). The transactions theory as described by Puchala and Adler gave further orientation on the possible indicators (Puchala, 1970 & Russett, 1970). The social categorsation theory (Hogg, 2001) and social identity theory (Weller, 1991) provided further understanding of what trust and collective identity mean and how are they created. Due to word limitation, a thorough literature review of the mentioned theories will not be presented, however the specific choice of theoretical interpretation will be justified.

4.1.   Precipitating conditions.

Adler and Bartlett dedicate the first tier of their framework for the precipitating conditions of exogenous and endogenous nature. These conditions come either as result of external threat, economic, technological or demographic changes, or new interpretations of social reality, and their role is to influence the societies to cooperate with each other (Adler and Barnett, 1998). In the case of the Western Balkans, the biggest incentive for the countries to cooperate were the threats of transnational organised crime, human trafficking, corruption, the influx of refugees and migration as those exceeded the capabilities of the single countries. Moreover, after the interference of the EU and the combining of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and enlargement policy, another factor for improving the regional relations is the potential integration into the European Union's community (Dreiack, 2016). Thus, the regional cooperation is perceived mostly as a mechanism enabling the integration into the European landscape (Dreiack, 2016; Petritsch, W. & Solioz, C., 2008). Therefore, it is perceived in this thesis that the degree of fulfilment of the conditions laid in the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) is a crucial precipitating condition for the social integration as they provide a new social reality in the prospect of membership, as well as the required changes in the economic and political environment (see Figure 1). According to Jean Claude-Junker, the Western Balkans countries must give priority to the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights (European Commission, 2017). Nevertheless, further conditions are related to democracy, functioning market economy and the conditions of SAA for regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations (European Commission, 2014). Therefore, the listed so far SAA requirements, are perceived as the precipitating conditions and their fulfilment will positively affect the community-building process. Moreover, it is argued by Russett that a great inequality damages the sense of common identity in a community (1998).

Given these arguments, the following expectations has been formulated:

E1. The precipitating conditions in the Western Balkans create favouring environment for the youth programmes to initiate the community-building process.

4.2.   Transactions.

Karl Deutsch considers transactions as "factories of shared identification" and through them, the social fabric is created among societies (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p.7). Donald Puchala defines the transactions as contacts between the states on governmental and non-governmental level (Puchala, 1970, p. 733). It must be taken into consideration that Puchala also argues that the transaction analysis applied to the regional integration, has many pitfalls despite the ability of investigating effectively some elements of the political integration (Puchala, 1970). Scholars interested in the transaction approach have focused on transactions in strictly the political and economic aspect and have measured the trade and economic exchanges with quantitative data while ignoring the need of qualitative explanation of the exchanges on the social level. Furthermore, Russett (1970) adopts several conditions related to the transaction between nations from Karl Deutsch (1957). Firstly, it is assumed that the higher the level of transaction and the higher the level is between nations rather than inside them, the more probable the future integration is (Deutsch, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998; Russett, 1970). Secondly, Russett (1970) argues that the level of transactions must be relatively higher to other systems, and it needs to be greater than what would be expected by random probability. Thirdly, transactions must be balanced through reciprocal transactions while, lastly, the level of capabilities must be higher than the level of burdens, meaning that the parties must have the capacity to carry the volume of exchanges and responsibilities, related to them. As the focus in this research is more on the process of community building among societies and not on the political level or the process of formal institutionalization, this thesis will not take the related conditions for the quality of transaction flows in consideration as stated by Deutsch and Russett (Russett, 1970). In the case of the youth policies the focus is on cultural exchanges perceived as a sub-type of social integration (Nye, 1968).

From the literature review on the potential impact of the youth participation and the concept of transactions and the matter of density as a sign for integration process, the following expectation has been formulated:

E2. The youth programmes provide the condition of density transaction flows for building a security community.

4.3.   Social learning framework.

There are various theories on learning focused on either the political or on the organisational dimension (Zito & Schout, 2009). A more constructivist approach focuses on learning as changing

identities. An example for that is the work of Etienne Wenger (2000) on communities of practices and social learning systems, which conceptually could be related to the Emanuel Adler interpretation of the security communities as communities of practices (Adler, 2008). Wenger perceives the communities of practices as a component of a broader social learning system. In the latter the knowledge and practices are defined by the community meanings and understandings (Wenger, 2000). The social learning for individuals is perceived as an active participation in social practices and in constructing identities in relation to other communities, whereas for communities it means refining the practice and ensuring new generations of members (Wenger, 2001). Learning takes place when a new member joins the community and a tension emerges between the social competence of the community and the personal experience of the new member (Wenger, 2000). It is illustrated as a dynamic interplay in which Wenger assumes that two developments will take place: the personal transformation and evolution of the social structure (2000). The author provides not only a definition of the social learning, but also a framework for analysing the learning systems. This framework can be used to analyse the learning process, which is a crucial element in the three tiers of Adler and Barnett (1998). The elements of the framework will be elaborated in the next paragraph.

The dimensions which construct the social learning systems according to Wenger are the communities of practices, the boundary dimension and identities (Wenger, 2000). The communities of practices are characterized by the collective understandings and competence that members develop in the community defined by the joint enterprise, the mutuality of the interactions and the shared repertoire of language and stories (Wenger, 2000). All these elements illustrate already developed community and internal processes; however, the boundary dimension reflects the interaction between different communities and the learning process emerging from this. The boundary dimension is considered a matter of interest for the exploration of the learning process in the Western Balkans as a result of the integration impetus towards the European Union's community. As it was mentioned previously, social learning is used in the meaning of the interplay between experience and competence. In this sense, the main element of competence learning in the Wenger's framework has theoretical resemblance with the argument of Niklas Bremberg (2015) that the socialisation process through which the actors learn from each other is about adopting new ways of doing something or in other words- adopting new practices and exchanging experience.

At the boundaries, as Wenger argues, the practices and experiences of each community diverge since in this dimension different communities are interacting. In the case of the Western Balkans this research argues that each Balkan society represents a separate community, all of which are interacting with each other, on the one hand, and individually interacting with the European Union community on the other

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hand. Before exploring these, it is necessary to specify the meaning of boundary. As Emanuel Adler specifies, boundaries are determined by the knowledge and identity of individuals (Adler, 2008). The practices of each community are recognisable through discourse and is expected that they will not be congruent but individuals during boundary encounters, such as exchanges, joint participation in projects, forums, will negotiate the meanings (Wenger, 2000). One could argue that the interaction between the Western Balkans and the EU is creating a multi-boundaries dimension of social learning (see Figure 3). In the context of the youth policies, the learning is taking place not only on interpersonal level, but also among the CSOs from the region and the European Union Member States. So, the context of the learning is consisted of two dimensions-practical one- exchanging practices in regard to the youth policies among the organisations and on interpersonal level, and cultural one- building awareness of the cultural similarities and differences among the individuals.
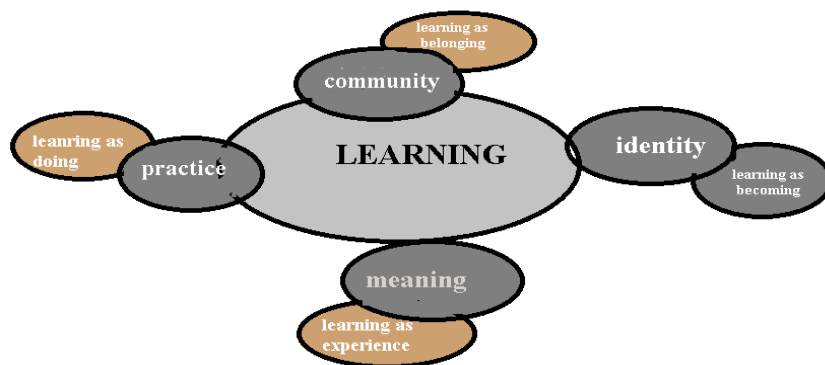
Figure 2. Components of a social theory of learning. Adopted and retrieved from: Wenger, E. (2000) *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 5 Cambridge University Press. Third edition.

The figure shows that the learning process is complex, and it encompasses four sub processes-belonging, becoming, experiencing and doing.

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Figure 3. The boundaries dimensions of social learning between the Western Balkans' societies and the European Union's community [2]

In order to explore the process of learning and to see whether the boundaries interaction is bridging the societies, Wenger combines six dimensions to research the learning system in depth. He crosses coordination, transparency and negotiability, combined with the three ways in which members are bounded to the system-engagement, imagination and alignment (see Figure 2) (Wenger, 2000). The questions arising as a result of the multidimensional crossing can be used to understand whether the learning process at the boundary dimension actually leads to connecting the interacting societies.

In this context, based on the Wenger's questions (see Figure 4) and adjusting them to the case of the youth policies in the Western Balkans, a list of indicators is presented in chapter VI.

All this said, the following expectations have been formulated:

> *E3. The youth programmes provide the condition of social learning among the EU's and Western Balkans' youth, for building a security community.*
> *E4. The youth programmes provide the condition of social learning among the Western Balkans' youth for building a security community.*

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[2] FYROM is an abbreviation for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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	Coordination	Transparency	Negotiability
Engagement	What opportunities exist for joint activities, problem-solving, and discussions to both surface and resolve differences through action?	Do people provide explanations, coaching, and demonstrations in the context of joint activities to open windows on to each other's practices?	Are joint activities structured in such a way that multiple perspectives can meet and participants can come to appreciate each other's competences?
Imagination	Do people have enough understanding of their respective perspectives to present issues effectively and anticipate misunderstandings?	What stories, documents, and models are available to build a picture of another practice? What experience will allow people to walk in the other's shoes? Do they listen deeply enough?	Can both sides see themselves as members of an overarching community in which they have common interests and needs?
Alignment	Are instructions, goals, and methods interpretable into action across boundaries?	Are intentions, commitments, norms, and traditions made clear enough to reveal common ground and differences in perspectives and expectations?	Who has a say in negotiating contracts and devising compromises?

Figure 4. Boundary dimensions framework. Adopted and retrieved from Wenger (2000).

4.4.   Organisations and institutions.

Adler and Barnett (1998) argue that organisations and social institutions are important process factors in building a community. This is could be due to the wide range of supporting activities provided by the organisations as they directly promote trust and collective identity through institutionalised practices, by monitoring the interaction and establishing norms (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Secondly, it is argued that organisations provide venues for socialisation where actors can learn and build positive reciprocal expectations (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Moreover, the international organisations, are perceived as creators of "common fate" and culture through the teaching of values and norms, and as such, they can even foster the generating of mutual identification narratives (Russett, 1998). All this comes to say, that organisations are a crucial process factor for the emergence of community.

Scholars have acknowledged the role of the EU as a security community-building organisation (Bremberg, 2015; Adler, 1998). Its role is also related to the way the Union perceives its security outside its borders where is using the promotion of its enlargement or closed-partnership to strengthen the security, political and economic conditions in the EU's neighbours. A way to achieve this is through exporting practices and offering institutional settings for fostering the socialisation and learning (Bremberg, 2015). These settings in the context of the youth programmes, which in this thesis are argued to be an example of an institutionalised practices as mentioned above, it is perceived to be related to the

programmes' structure and implementation. It can be argued that the use of various tools designed for better performance of the programmes, would enhance the process of social learning and transactions. Moreover, it is expected that as more developed the settings are, the more successful are the learning and transactions, meaning that if more instruments and tools are available to youth and youth organisations, more enhanced is the process.

Having all this said, the following expectation has been formulated:

E5: The wide institutionalised settings of the youth policies are influencing in a positive way the conditions for building a security community.

In chapter two several conclusions were drawn from the conducted literature review on the youth engagement. It is worth reminding that it is expected that the youth engagement will have an impact on the community level. As shown by different authors, youth engagement can lead to the development of a sense of belonging to a community, as well as social connectedness, creating changes in the environment, and building awareness and commitment for improving the conditions in the community. It is also expected that, provided with the intensive civil society networks and stronger social capital, these effects would have a wider impact, covering the civil societies in the six Balkan countries. In order to provide evidence for this, it is required to examine the network structure of the youth policies build from the EU and on regional level in the Western Balkans.

This produces one more expectation:

E6: The youth programmes provide a wide network of civil society organisations as a condition for building a security community.

4.5. Knowledge

The structural factor in the second tier of Adler and Barnett's framework (see Figure 2), is consisted of two elements: knowledge and power. The latter is seen as the presence of a state which acts as a magnet in the integration process and which defines the collective meanings that have to be shared (Adler and Bartlett, 1998, p. 39). However, in the context of the cases chosen for analysis in this thesis and the focus on the societies, it is considered that power is not a relevant factor, as it suggests political dominance, and has no place in the youth policies. Therefore, it will not be included as a variable.

The second element –knowledge- is a crucial factor for the social integration, as well as for the cases chosen in this research. According to Adler and Barnett (1998) knowledge is a social construct consisted of intersubjective meanings and understandings. Deutsch himself is not clear about what the content of these meanings should be, however Adler and Barnett argue that the most related to the security

community are the liberal ideas and democracy (1998). They claim that the liberal ideas are most relevant for promotion of collective identity, trust and peaceful change. In the context of the European Union, it could be argued that the message that the Union wants to spread to its prospective members are its fundamental values included in the Charter of fundamental rights. They can be illustrated as included in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (European Union, 2016).

This said and based on the expectations built from the literature review of the youth engagement, the following expectation has been formulated:

E7: *The youth programmes are providing the condition of knowledge for building a security community in the Western Balkans.*

4.6.   Trust

Until now, the variables that were described are related to the process and structural conditions for building a community. They are the factors that have to be present to expect the emergence of a community. The positive interaction between these factors produces the measurable outcome of trust and collective identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998).

Trust is a concept with wide volume of interpretations whether is meant to be between states, individuals either in political, social or organisational settings. According to Adler and Barnett's interpretation, trust involves the element of risk as one cannot predict the behavior of the other. The deepest expression of trust in this sense is the expectation for peaceful change or that any conflict will be resolved without the use of force but by peaceful institutionalised means (Adler and Barnett, 1998). The lack of prediction in this sense could be overcome through social learning and transactions as in continuous interaction one learns about the other. It is evident that the meaning of trust is positioned on the level of political elites of governments. However, this interpretation is not suitable for the cases chosen in this thesis since the focus is on the individuals on community level and particularly on the level of the multi-ethnic societies in the Balkans. Thus, it is appropriate to adopt the approach of the social categorisation theory towards trust as it helps to understand the multiethnic character of the societies. This theory argues that an individual's behavior is dependent on the in- and out-group belonging (Hogg, 2001). Each group has a collective meaning which is acquired in contrast to the other groups. To gain more understanding of the collective meaning, it is considered appropriate to look at Alexander Wendt's constructivist explanation of knowledge as the latter is a factor directly influencing the development of trust. Wendt talks about a collective knowledge as an equivalent to inter-subjective understandings (Wendt, 1991). Furthermore, it is perceived as a convergence between beliefs and

shared mental models but as well as calculations of the individual agent of the other's behaviour (Wendt, 1991). In this sense, collective knowledge motivates actors to engage in practices or to have a particular attitude towards others, thereby expecting a positive attitude in return from the other side. Ultimately, this means overcoming the ethnic prejudices and stereotypes in one's behaviour and developing tolerance. An illustration of this argument is the conclusion of Soroka and Johnston (2008) that intense socialisation among ethnicities can diminish the negative attitude and enhance the construct of trust. In this sense trust can be understood as the expectation for positive attitude from the others and the openness for further cooperation.

Having in mind the different theoretical approaches to trust, developed in this paragraph, and relying on the three-tier theoretical framework, the following expectation has been formulated:

E8: The youth programmes lead to emergence of trust among the societies in the Western Balkans and among the EU and the region as a condition for building a security community.

4.7. Collective identity

The concept of identity is characterised by wide vagueness and lack of common use especially when it comes to the theories of international relations (Weller, 1991). Identity could be seen as externally given or defined by the state, and on the other hand in more reflectivist approach, as developed by the individual in the process of socialisation. The latter model is recognised by Karl Deutsch and is also the fundamental assumption in the social-psychology theory of social identity. The meaning that is pursued in this research is closer to the social identity as it seeks to explore a process of collective or community identification developed by the individuals through socialisation. Thus, the identity is not topped-down by the society or the state but is rather developed on the society level by reflection in various practices and interaction. Adler and Barnett (1998) remind that having a collective identity means that people identify their fate with the others', but also that they differentiate the collective with other out-groups. Furthermore, the social identity theory assumes that the out-group members would be assigned lower values and in respect to the use of violence thus it will be justified (Weller, 1991). On the other hand, if there is a sense of belonging between individuals, meaning that each of them individually recognises the others as members of one group or a wide community, there will be no out-group differentiation in matters of values and use of force (Weller, 1991). This comes to say, as Deutsch argues, that a sense of belonging would lead to expectations of peaceful change. Furthermore, the construct of this group identification has to reflect the existence of collective understanding of the social world. Therefore, the sense of belonging is expected to be recognised in narratives and storylines which represent the common meaning in which people think as "we", sharing common future and common interest.

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It is necessary to make one clarification on the nature of the collective identity that is researched in the case of the youth policies in the Western Balkans. As Suzette R. Grillot and Rebecca J. Cruise (2014) argue, before identifying with Europe, the Balkans have to develop internal sense of belonging and trust. Grillot and Cruise (2014) even talk about the development of a Western Balkan identity. However, the problem of constructing a Western Balkan identity has a very complexed nature and scholars have not been united in their approach towards the idea of regional identity given the negative connotations related to the word "Balkan" (Koneska, 2007; Subotic, 2011; Grillot and Cruise, 2014; Kolstø, 2016).

Therefore, this thesis does not argue whether a Western Balkan identity has been created or simply a European identification. It attempts to empirically identify whether a regional identity has been constructed as an outcome of the interaction and further to explore what are the meanings constructing the regional identity in the region.

Out of the above, the following expectation has been formulated

E9. As a result of the transaction and social learning, the youth programmes create a collective identity in the Western Balkans as a condition for building a security community.

V.   Research design and methodology.

This chapter will present the type of research design chosen to guide the research process in this thesis. First, an argumentation for the choice of case research will be provided. Secondly, the type of case research will be specified. Next, the type of data and the method of its collection and analysis will be explained.

5.1.   Choice of case study design.

Every successful research depends on well-developed research design. This is because the design provides the correct communication between the theory and the data. Moreover, it enables providing the right answers to the right questions (Toshkov, 2014). Choosing the most appropriate design according to the research question is crucial, therefore it is considered that for building the research design, the successful approach is to adopt strategies from various researchers. Yin (2014) gives direction in regard to choosing the proper design and defines five types of research questions: *who, what, where, how and why.* He further clarifies two more conditions for choosing the research strategy, namely if there is control over behavioural events and whether the research focus is on contemporary events or not (Yin, 2014). The research question that is formulated in this thesis, corresponds to the *how* type as it seeks understanding of how the youth programmes work and how they affect the social integration in the Western Balkans. Since the objective is to analyse the European Union youth programmes covering the timeframe between 2000 and 2017 the focus on contemporary events is evident. Further argument for the choice of research design is Yin's (2014) and Stake's (1995) claim that a case study is highly appropriate for programme studying. Furthermore, the researcher has no control over the behavioural events thus, according to Yin classification, it categorises as case study. The case study method allows to investigate a phenomenon in its context and to create a thick description of the case.

5.2.   Collective case study design

To fulfil the objective of the research, the analysis of three cases is considered necessary. The specific EU youth programmes, chosen as units in the thesis, have had three programme periods from its beginning until now, so covering them all will enhance the in depth-analysis. Furthermore, after a review on the various classifications of case study, this thesis finds as highly corresponding to the research objective the rationales of the Robert Stake's instrumental case. The logic behind it is that the specific case that is chosen is instrumental for accomplishing something more than the understanding of the case itself (Stake, 1995) In this sense, by analysing the three EU youth programmes -YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+Youth in Action as study cases, and their particular focus on the Western Balkans, three objectives are being considered. The first thing that is pursued in the thesis is an empirical test of the youth participation as application to Karl Deutsch's theory as to understand whether the youth initiatives can influence the societal and political integration. Secondly, this would build more

in-depth understanding of the potential political effects of the youth activism and lastly, would serve as expanding the theoretical operationalisation of the security community theory. However, as the instrumental case design is a single case-study, whereas the focus in this thesis is on three cases, then a collective case study design, involving several instrumental cases, is more suitable (Stake, 1995). When choosing the cases, the criterion stated by Stake for maximizing of what we can learn, has been followed, by picking cases which are easy to get and hospitable to the inquiry (Stake, 1995). In this regard, the European Union provides access to various kinds of data regarding the youth programmes, thus makes the data-gathering process easier. Although Stake recommends variety in the choice of cases, it is perceived here that having similar cases would complement the understanding of the overall problem. Furthermore, the cases are selected in order to replicate the insights in the three youth programmes.

5.3.   Validity and reliability of the research.

To achieve a research of high quality, as Yin (2014) suggests, four tests has to be conducted for passing the construct validity, internal and external validity, as well as reliability of the collected data. To achieve construct validity, three steps must be taken. Firstly, one has to define all concepts included in the research and secondly, to identify the operational measures matching the concepts. Lastly, multiple sources of evidence must be used. The concept-definition has been delivered in the literature review, as well as in the theoretical framework and the second step has been reflected in the operationalisation chapter. According to Yin's (2014) instructions, it is necessary to clarify how the youth programmes will be studied as an application to the theory of security community. What is done so far is discussion of the theoretical assumptions related to the community building made according to the three-tier framework of Adler and Barnett (1998). After that, the meaning of the recognised variables is further explored through various theories which were considered as most appropriate to the focus on the societal aspect of the regional integration.

Further, for passing the internal validity test, pattern matching is applied to analyse whether the mentioned variables or conditions had been provided by the youth programmes and ultimately, is tested as to whether the outcomes of trust and collective identity, expected by the theory, have been produced as a result of the youth participation.

For passing the external validity test, the research is based on multiple cases, which, as it was mentioned before, are interlinked. Moreover, due to the multiple cases it is not possible to reach to a statistical generalisation as with a quantitative study. The generalisation is treated here with the logic of replication of the findings in more than one case, thus passing the test of external validity (Yin, 2014). Moreover, as Yin argues, having a *how-* type of research question is essential for building an analytical

generalisation. Lastly, to achieve reliability of the collected data, a database has been created in which the coding information has been stored on excel sheets.

5.4. Data collection and analysis.

The collection of data is done by relying on theoretical propositions, which have been drawn earlier upon the literature review and the theoretical framework. Given the specifics of the three-tier framework, each of the formulated variables set by the theoretical framework as well as the literature review, require specific data. Further, the qualitative data is scanned and analysed through content analysis. In conducting the analysis, the Stage Model of Bruce Berg (2009) was adopted (see Figure 5). In the preparation phase of the content analysis, several coding methods were chosen corresponding to the manifest coding. For the First Cycle of coding the *descriptive coding,* which "summarises in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" was used along with the *hypothesis coding*, which uses predetermined codes based on the theoretical expectations (Saldana, 2004, p.70). After the revision of the results, during the second cycle of coding, the pattern coding was used to identify the presence of the variables laid in the three-tier framework synthesising the results from the first cycle (Saldana, 2004).

The analysis of the qualitative data helps to establish the relation between the process, described by the theory and the process which is being tested empirically. From the three analytic techniques suggested by Yin (2014), namely pattern matching, explanation building and logic models, the latter-the program-level logic model together with the pattern matching are chosen in this research (see Figure 4). The logic models consist of matching empirically observed events to theoretically prescribed ones. In this research, the former are the youth programmes and the latter are the community-building process prescribed by Karl Deutsch (1957) in his theory and in Adler and Barnett's (1998) three tier framework. The key in this technique is the existence of a repeated cause-and-effect sequence of events which are linked together. As the youth programmes are seen in this context as events, the three cases -YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+ Youth in action programmes are analysed as linked. In qualitative analysis which is adopted here, first the consistency between the observed and the originally stipulated sequence for each case will be compared. After affirming or rejecting the original sequence, new data has been added, as Yin (2014) clarifies this will be in the form of different variables to the initial equation model to explain why the sequence again had been affirmed or rejected. To operationalise this, the first programme YOUTH has been tested in order to determine whether it has provided the theoretically prescribed conditions: dense transactions, institutional settings, knowledge and social learning. Secondly, it was identified whether the programme had produced immediate outcome related to the emergence of trust and collective identity. Next, the second programme was tested based on the achievements of the first one and based on new data. Thus, the replication logic has been applied to

examine the level of conditions and consequently the intermediate outcome. Lastly, the same procedure was applied to the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and the ultimate outcome that has been reached until 2017. In the process of analysis, however, the gathered data did not provide sufficient evidence for the distinction of immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes, despite the significant efforts and time spent in collecting of data. Therefore, it was decided to illustrate the outcomes in a generalised way. Thus, the emergence of collective identity and trust has been shown as ultimate outcome.

The data that is used in the research is qualitative. The unit of analysis are the projects specifically related to the Western Balkans. The data have been collected through desk research using policy documents and evaluation reports, published by the European Commission for the youth programmes and narrowed down to the ones specifically focused on the Western Balkans, and published by other actors engaged in the youth programmes, including web-sites of local NGOs, or research institutes. Furthermore, the national youth strategies also served as a data source.

A strong advantage of the collected data is the qualitative approach, applied for gaining the information through interviews, conducted by the European Union with participants and trainers in the projects, as well as with members of non-governmental organisations, engaged in coordination and implementing the projects. However, a limitation related to the data collection, is on one hand the researcher's low level of understanding of the national language of the Western Balkans countries, therefore mostly documents available in English are analysed, and in exceptional cases publications in Serbian and Macedonian language are used as well, due to the similarity with the authors native language. On the other hand, working with documents published by the EU, a possible bias from the organisation could affect the reliability of its reports. To overcome this drawback, a triangulation of the data was pursued by analysing reports published by non-EU institutions such as consultancy companies. Thirdly, there is significant misbalance in the volume of data on each programme, meaning that the Youth in Action has significantly more data, than the rest of the programmes, given also the fact that Erasmus+ Youth in Action is still being implemented.

More qualitative data are collected through interviews, conducted specifically for this research. For this purpose, several experts had been reached out to, however only three answered positively to the request for conducting interview. In the preparation phase of the interview, the choice between standardised and semi-standardised type was made and the latter was preferred, since the standardised does not allow deviation from the question order or making additional clarifications. After receiving confirmation for participation with the interview, an interview protocol was sent by email to the subject. The officers who were interviewed are valuable for the research, as they provide on the one hand

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observation from the field of the youth in the region and more specifically through the perspective of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)[3] and on the other, the officer from SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre (SEE) provided more understanding on the programmes under analysis.

In the process of data collection, a content analysis has been performed on all qualitative evidence using a manifest coding to show the presence of the variables.

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[3] RYCO is an independently functioning institutional mechanism which works in close collaboration with the European Union and the national governments for coordinating the youth programmes in the Western Balkans

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VI.   Operationalisation of the variables.

In this chapter the six variables, together with the precipitating conditions, are operationalised. As this thesis has adopted a qualitative approach and has performed a content analysis, the variables are transformed into codes. The latter, as well as the related indicators, are illustrated bellow (see Tables 4,5 and 6).

As it was mentioned in Chapter IV, the precipitating conditions related to the criteria set in the SAA are related mainly to two groups- economic and political. The criteria are transformed into indicators for measuring the level of the conditions. Moreover, the latter are analysed from the report published by the Office of the Committee for European Integration in 2008, as well as the progress reports published by the European Commission on the six Western Balkans' countries in 2018. As illustrated in Table 4 (see below), several codes are used to measure the level of the political and economic conditions in the Western Balkans, by using the corresponding codes for high, medium and low level.

Variable	Indicators	Codes
Economic conditions	Unemployment Economic stability Growth	**High level**- Significant progress; sufficient; satisfactory. **Medium level**- substantial; tangible; broadly in line with European standards. **Low level**- need of further action;
Political condition	Rule of law Corruption Democratic institutions Freedom of media	**High level**- Significant progress; sufficient; satisfactory. **Medium level**- substantial; tangible; broadly in line with European standards. **Low level**- need of further action;

Table 4: Operationalisation of the precipitating conditions. Adopted from the Stabilisation and Accession Agreements between EU and the Western Balkans.

The next table (see Table 5) illustrates the conditions included in the second tier with the responding codes, which are used for the content analysis, as well as the indicators, which served to scan the policy reports and documents for the presence of the conditions. As the analysis also examined whether the conditions have led to the theoretically prescribed outcomes, it was perceived that the efficiency of the conditions also had to be analysed. Therefore, the documents were scanned to see if they indicate a quantitative increase of the flows in the form of exchanges and projects during the year. Also, it is examined to what extent there are conditions for easy access to these projects.

Additionally, the theoretical framework prescribed that the variable of transaction density has to be measured to see whether the transaction flows are bigger after the introduction of the programmes. Adopting the argument of Deutsch for the high density of transactions, then the approach towards the

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transaction flows provided by the youth programmes would be quantitative on the one hand, to check whether they have led to increase in the frequency of contacts between the European Union's and the Western Balkans' youth, and among the countries in the Balkans. In the case of the youth programmes, a transaction flow can be seen the various projects that are engaging participants from at least one country from the Western Balkans. Moreover, the quantitative illustration means also observing whether because of the youth exchanges and the promotion of youth engagement in the period between 2000 and 2017 there is rise in the emergence of local regional youth projects aimed at the regional integration and regional cooperation in the Balkans. It also has to observed whether the programmes are providing favouring conditions for the high density of the projects.

The impact reports, published by the European Commission and SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre, are used to measure how efficient the implementation of all conditions was. This has led to three different findings- whether the expectations are confirmed, meaning there is evidence that the conditions are available. Correspondingly, the lack of confirmation meant that there is no evidence found for the availability of the variables in the specific programme. Lastly, the partial confirmation of the expectation shows that the conditions are available; however, the efficiency of the implementation is not high.

Variable	Available	Indicators	Codes
Knowledge	At least 3	Promotion of democracy, respect for human rights, active participation, tolerance and citizenship	Promote respect for human rights;
Social learning	At least 3	-The youth policies create opportunities for joint activities, problem-solving, and discussions of both surface and resolve differences through action and provide opportunities for participation and engagement	Bridging the cultural gap; Exchange of good practices
		-the experiences allow youth to understand the perspective of the "other" side; -the intentions, norms and values are made clear enough to reveal common ground and differences in perspectives and expectations;	Mutual understanding;
		-the joint activities structured in such a way that multiple perspectives can meet, and participants can come to appreciate each other's competences;	
Organisations and institutions	At least 3	Including local organisations; building network and partnerships; implementing tools and instruments;	Developing civil society; Strengthening partnerships
Transactions	At least 3	Projects; exchanges;	Structural initiatives; projects

Table 5: Operationalisation of the variables in the second tier.

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Lastly, the documents and the interview are examined to check whether the three youth programmes have projected as immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcome, the variables from the third tier- trust and collective identity. The indicators and the codes for the content analysis are illustrated in the table below (see Table 6). The analysis is conducted with the specific aim to check if the outcomes are not only projected in the programmes, but also if they have been produced.

Variable	Available	Indicators	Codes
Trust	At least 5	Overcoming the negative attitudes	Tolerance, solidarity; combat xenophobia; abandon stereotypes;
Collective identity	At least 5	Sense of belonging to a wider community; sense of common interests and future;	European awareness and citizenship

Table 6: Operationalisation of the variables in the third tier.

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VII. Explanation of the EU's youth policies. The Western Balkans' projects.

This chapter presents a description of the legal framework of the youth policies, created on EU level, as well as an illustration of the content, aim and objectives of the three youth programmes, which are being researched in this thesis.

The European Union's education policies, which are focused on developing quality education and cooperation among the Member States, were originally introduced in the Treaty of Rome and since then several programmes have emerged. In 1995 the European Parliament and the Council adopted Decision 818 from 1995 regarding the third phase of the 'Youth for Europe' programme, which have established the basis for cooperation in the sector of youth (European Parliament and Council, 1995). Further, the education policies were integrated in the Amsterdam Treaty by declaring the Community's determination for development of knowledge of the highest level among the Member States. (European Communities, 1997). Additional youth activities were regulated, such as the voluntary service action and training activities and ultimately - the cooperation with third countries in the Agreement on the European Economic Area (European Parliament and Council, 1998). Consequently, all these activities were united with the introduction of the 'Youth' Community action programme, from hereinafter called the YOUTH programme, which was implemented in the period of 2000 until 2006 (European Parliament and the Council, 2000).

The youth programmes aim to contribute for constructing a "Europe of knowledge", thereby fostering cooperation in youth policies, the informal education and training, with the ultimate goal of enhancing an active citizenship and employability (European Parliament and the Council, 2000). The instruments that are prescribed for the implementation of the programme are being grouped as follows: Youth for Europe, European voluntary service (EVS), youth initiatives, joint actions and support measures (European Parliament and the Council, 2000). The target group of the programme are the young people between the ages of 15 to 25 (for some projects the age limit is 30) from the Member States. Nevertheless, access is granted to youth from partner countries as well, although not to all instruments, but only to the youth exchanges, EVS and support measures. The implementation of the projects is decentralised, thus important role is given to the civil society organisations, the National Agencies, providing information about the projects and support to the civil society organisations, and lastly to the organisations such as SALTO SEE, which provide further assistance and trainings. As the research interest is on the strand of cooperation with the Third states, the objectives of the latter will be examined.

The youth exchanges are defined as trans-national partnerships between the young people of the partner countries from at least two EU Member States, with the aim of promoting the informal education in the region. The leading principle in the programmes is youth engagement, which takes the form of

participation in youth exchanges, voluntary work and preparing projects related to the values, promoted by the European Union. Regarding voluntary work, the aims of these projects, which are supervised by a host organisation and a sending organisation, are for the youth to meet the "needs of society in a wide range of fields (social, socio-cultural, environmental, cultural)" (the European Parliament and the Council, 2000, Annex). More importantly it is projected that the young participants will interact with different cultures and gain experience in a multicultural civil society. The *young volunteers* participating in the EVS are in the age range between 18 and 25 and can take part in trans-national projects for a period of three weeks to one year.

The last group of activities – the support measures - is closely related to the previous two actions-exchanges and EVS and it aims at building capacity for their execution. The support measures are focused on providing training and cooperation with the individuals and organisations engaged in the youth policies in the form of seminars, feasibility studies and trainings. Additionally, the support measures enhance the dissemination of information on the projects, raise the awareness of youth for field activities, and also provide evaluation of the programmes' implementation and impact on the youth and the civil society.

As stated in the YOUTH programme guide, the objectives of the partnerships with the third countries are to strengthen democracy, promote human rights and preserve cultural diversity (European Commission, 2006). More importantly, it is stated that the programme aims at promoting the sense of solidarity, tolerance and universal peace (European Commission, 2002). The three activities, which were mentioned above, are structured differently in the researched youth programmes. In the YOUTH programme guide, these activities are defined as Action 1-Youth for Europe, Action 2-European Voluntary Service and Action 5- Support measures, and in each one there is an additional strand for cooperation with third countries. In the Youth in Action programme, the cooperation with partner countries is emphasized to a greater extent, rather than in the YOUTH and in current Erasmus+YiA and is introduced in a separate action- Action 3 –Youth in the world, covering the exchanges and support measures. The Western Balkans' partnership is part of the sub-action 3.1 dedicated to partnership with the neighbouring countries. Access to the EVS is regulated in Action 2-European Voluntary Service. Lastly, the Erasmus+ Youth in Action introduced a reformed structure of the previous programmes by "removing the artificial boundaries" between the different projects and promoting synergies in the various fields of education and learning (European Commission, 2018). Also, there is a shift in the priority programme. In contrast to the previous programmes, which emphasized the intercultural dialogue, solidarity and tolerance, the current focus of the youth policies is on the improvement of the economic conditions which affect directly the young people.

VIII.   Analysis and findings.

8.1.   The matrix- European integration, regional security and the youth policies.

The integration of the Western Balkans is perceived by the European Union as necessary step for ensuring the security and stability of the Union itself as it was also stressed by the former director of the European Commission's DG Enlargement Pierre Mirel: *"It would however be dangerous for lukewarm support to dominate over the Union's strategic interest, since the stability of the Western Balkans is a guarantee of our security."* (Mirel, 2018, p. 14). This means strengthening the borders through building stability in the neighbouring region. Therefore, the EU security is one of the main incentives for the accession process of the six Balkans countries. That is why the EU initiated the Stability and Association Agreements although the region was generally not ready for that step. Serbia was not willing to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Bosnia and Herzegovina has very complex ethnic type of statehood and it was criticized for the discriminative election law (Mirel, 2018). Macedonia suffered from severe political crisis which together with the dispute with Greece over its constitutional name impeded the integration progress. Kosovo's independence remains an issue, especially due to the strong position of Serbia not to accept it. This comes to say that the political situation on the Balkans is very complex. One of the factors that the EU has recognised as crucial for the integration and the reconciliation among the states is the civil society (Mirel, 2018). This is highlighted also in the enlargement strategy of the EU towards the Balkans in 2013- *"An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system... (for) supporting reconciliation in societies divided by conflict"* (European Commission, 2013, p. 8) The sense of European belonging of the Balkans is something that makes the integration process even more logical. The acceptance from the EU civil society is evident from the impact reports, in which participants from the Programme countries attest that the Western Balkans are being accepted as part of the EU community and that the integration will enhance the positive development of the region:

*"It is important that the SEE (South East Europe) countries are embraced into the aspirations of Europe as a counter-force to the regressive elements in these countries" (*Slana &Skulij, 2015, p. 35*).*

One of the most successful initiatives aiming to enhance the Western Balkans' integration is the Berlin process, initiated in 2014 as a result of the enlargement fatigue in the EU. It provides cooperation on political, economic and social level between the EU and the six Western Balkans countries and is one of the most important instruments for inter-regional cooperation. Apart from the security and political factors, the role of civil society and more specifically the youth sector is highlighted. As a result, the six Western Balkans' governments came to an agreement for the establishment of the biggest regional initiative on youth –the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). Its creation is a proof of

the importance of the youth sector for the reconciliation process and the will to improve the good neighbourly relations (Interviewee 1, personal communication, June 7th, 2018).

The youth initiatives are seen as tool for building active and resilient civil society through promoting the European citizenship and fostering the sense of European identity thus, enhancing the social integration of the region. However, there are still many challenges, which have caused decline in the pro-integration attitudes, such as the political situation in the Western Balkans, the Euroscepticism, the influence of the political elites, spreading nationalist narratives, the economic instability and even the migrant crisis in Europe (Topalli, 2007; Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018). These factors together with the low youth participation, resulting from loss of motivation for taking part in the European projects, are expected to lead to growth of radicalization. This may also lead to nationalism, intolerance within societies, discrimination and exclusion (Topalli, 2007). In this sense strengthening the sense of European citizenship is seen as a means to eradicate those negative consequences, to build up tolerance and solidarity in the region. Nevertheless, the negative perceptions and lack of ethnic tolerance is still highly present, and this hinders the accession condition of good neighbourly relations. Therefore, in order the Western Balkans to enter the EU community, the regional cooperation as well as the good neighbourly relations must be improved. It comes without saying that the youth policies have crucial role in influencing the negative attitudes, therefore it would be interesting to test whether this effect could be produced on regional level among the societies. It is interesting to observe the pick of civil society initiatives on local, regional and EU level which aim at promoting and facilitating the active participation of youth and engaging them in the political process.

In this context, the wide network will be examined further when presenting the sixth expectation on the impact of the wide network on the civil society. Before that, the expectations on the conditions, laid out in the theoretical framework, will be examined by analysing the policy documents, programme guides and evaluation reports on the implementation of the three youth programmes- YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+YiA.

8.2. Expectation 1: The precipitating conditions in the Western Balkans create favouring environment for the youth programmes to initiate the community-building process.

Since this thesis is not focused on the processes taking place on political or economic level in each Balkan country, a detailed analysis of the political and economic conditions will not be presented. Nevertheless, drawing a general picture of the situation in the region will serve as indicator whether there is a favourable environment for social integration. The impact reports on the youth programmes underline the high level of influence that the economic and political situation in the region can have on the programme outcomes. The interviews with officers from RYCO and SALTO SEE confirmed that

factors such as high unemployment, lack of infrastructure and institutional performance, as well as the lack of media freedom, can affect negatively the youth and the impact of the programmes.

Reports from 2008 published by the Office of the Committee for European Integration for the period covered by the YOUTH programme indicated that the progress in fulfilment of the conditions laid in the SAA regarding the economic situation, level of unemployment, which highly affects the youth cohort, varies among the Western Balkans countries (Sadowski & al., 2008). Moreover, the political and institutional reforms were present in the governments' agenda. However, the process of reforming has not achieved the sufficient level of democracy and economic growth. Furthermore, the lack of freedom of expression and independent media combined with political influence and spreading Euroscepticism hindered the process of reconciliation (Sadowski & al., 2008). This required greater efforts form EU and from the national governments to strengthen the democratic institutions and economic situation. There are problems related to the identity and ethnic identification, salient in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Montenegro due to the multiple-ethnic profile of the societies. Kosovo's independence was the main issue that was seen as a possible cause for emergence of conflict (Sadowski & al., 2008). All these factors have had significant negative influence on the social integration of the Western Balkans societies and more specifically on the youth as reported by the young people participating in the projects:

"They do not take into account the real situation regarding mobility in the Western Balkans region, including non-existing infrastructure and political issues, which do not allow for straight lines to be drawn and thus calculate distances." (n.a., 2015, p. 4) It is evident that the infrastructure and the problems in the political sector were obstacles for the mobility and intensive interaction among youth.

Local observations on the media provided by officials from RYCO show that there is general lack of media freedom and this has negative influence on the process of reconciliation. This is because media can *"reproduce … the negative narratives and the hate speech among the young people from the region"* (Interviewee 1, personal communication, June 7th, 2018) This illustrates that the media is taking advantage of the existing hatred and negative attitudes and is even escalating them through negative narratives, driven by a political influence.

According to the most recent reports published by the European Commission, the six Western Balkans countries are continuing steadily the implementing of the requested by the Commission reforms, related to the public institutions and judicial system, as well as efforts in fighting the organized crime and corruption (European Commission, 2018a). Nevertheless, Montenegro is advised to further strengthen its efforts in reforming, whereas Serbia is the leading country by level of successful developments, however it must continue the structural dialogue with Kosovo as a fulfillment of the

condition of good neighbourly relations (European Commission, 2018d). The report on FYROM outlines a positive progress, whereas the political elite in Kosovo have not been very successful in fulfilling the requested changes concerning the democratic elections and institutional reforms (European Commission, 2018c; European Commission, 2018f). The results show that the progress in the different countries varies, nevertheless three of the factors most reflecting on the young people–the freedom of media, public administration efficiency and level of unemployment remain unsatisfactory. Therefore, the conditions in the region are still not very favourable for creating a good environment for openness between the societies. This comes to say, that the expectation outlined in the beginning of the paragraph has been disconfirmed.

8.3. Expectation 2. The youth programmes provide the condition of density transaction flows for building a security community.

As it was explained in the previous chapters, the density of transaction flows is a crucial condition for an intensive interaction and socialisation. By transaction, this research defined the youth projects, consisted of exchanges, voluntary work, forums and trainings. The density of the transactions was measured by testing whether they have increased significantly in comparison to the period prior to the programmes and whether there are favouring conditions for their implementation, such as easy access and ability to reach even the most marginalised and vulnerable youth.

The programme guide of the YOUTH programme provides evidence that there is an increase of the cultural exchanges between the European Union and Western Balkans and among the Balkans countries since the start of the programmes thanks to the relaxed visa regime and the later inclusion of the Western Balkans in the "White" Schengen List. This has made possible the mobility between the regions, which before the introduction of the regime was very difficult or even not possible. There is gradual increase in the number of projects in which SEE's youth participates since the beginning of the YOUTH programme and during the YiA programme. The reports state number of total 129 projects in the YOUTH programmes as part of the Action 1: Youth for Europe promoting short term exchanged, in three years period (2000-2002), and 304 projects during the beginning of the Youth in Action programme (2007-2009) (Slana & Skulij, 2015, p.26). Statistically, the increase of projects is in fact confirmed. Nevertheless, traveling among the region is still troublesome. Respondents report that there is not so much access to the programmes due to lack of active promotion on local level or lack of sufficient funding, especially for specific projects.

This tendency continued during the current programme and even participants note gradual deterioration due to the lack of sufficient financing and efficient promotion of the programme locally, for which

responsibility is held both from the Commission, and from the National Agencies. Evidence for this is found in the report on the SEE strand of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action, published by the SALTO SEE:

"The Erasmus+ programme should be more visible and there should be targeted promotion among youngster and youth organisations." (n.a., 2015, p.6) And further it is stated that the financial conditions of the programme do not provide equal access for youth. Thus, it cannot reach the most vulnerable groups of young people, which are in risk of marginalization because of either economic situation or ethnic background (n.a., 2015).

The low level of transactions in the current programme is clear from the fact that the youth projects under the Western Balkans Youth Window are mainly focused on the capacity-building strand of Action 2 and for the period between 2015 and 2017 only103 projects had been selected for financing (EACEA, 2018; EACEA, 2017; EACEA 2016).

Having all this said, the expectation of density transactions has been partially confirmed for the first two programmes, given the lack of previous conditions for interregional mobility and the introduction of the "White" Schengen List regime. Nevertheless, in the current programme the analysis of reports revealed crucial issues related to the access of youth to the projects, which disconfirmed the expectation that there is a density of transactions as the projects are not reaching the entire region equally. Moreover, data indicates that the level of participation of the individual states highly varies, for example Kosovo has 2 exchange projects for the entire Youth in Action programme, and whereas the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has 153 (see Figure 5).

8.4. Expectation 3. The youth programmes provide the condition of social learning among the EU's and Western Balkans' youth, for building a security community.

As it was stated in the theoretical framework, it is expected that the youth programmes would present conditions for crossing the learning boundaries between the communities and during which the youth would gain new competences. To check this expectation, the documents, published by the European Commission and SALTO SEE were examined by looking for indicators such as- new competences, adopting new practices, understanding of cultural differences and similarities (see Table 4). In this sense gaining intercultural competences is the result of the intercultural learning. A useful definition for exploring these competences is provided by SALTO Cultural Diversity, part of the SALTO Resource Centre network, which contains eight elements- 1. taking active role in confronting social injustice and discrimination; 2. promoting human rights; 3. understanding culture as dynamic and complex and fostering willingness to explore the others' culture; 4. sense of solidarity or awareness of the other; 5. overcoming the feeling of insecurity; 6. developing critical thinking; 7. empathy,

understood as respect for cultural diversity and changing stereotyping thinking; and 8.fostering tolerance of ambiguity or accepting the reasons for others' behaviour (Bortini & Motamed-Afshari, 2011). After conducting a content analysis, it was discovered that the three programmes –YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+ Youth in Action provide the conditions of exchanging experience and adopting new practices, as well as to a certain extent the intercultural competences, according to the mentioned definition. Learning through non-formal methods is the primary focus of the youth programmes and is evident from the main objective, listed in the programme guides and the impact reports on the YOUTH and YiA programmes: "*Its main objectives are to contribute to the achievement of a Europe of knowledge*" (Costanzo & al., 2003, p.7). The idea of Europe of knowledge may also be related to the EU strategy of unification of the formal and informal education to construct a knowledge-based society as stated in the Lisbon Strategy in the field of employment and social policies (Rodrigue, Warmerdam & Triomphe, 2010).

Also, the concept of gaining competence for the future transition to the labour market through doing and experiencing is the cornerstone of the non-formal learning which stands in the basis of the youth programmes. However, in the context of the building stable societies and overcoming the conflict past, the competences must be looked from the angle of intercultural learning, self-awareness, exploring the different cultures and crossing the boundaries of the different communities. This type of learning is crucial for overcoming the sources of ethnic divides and tensions among which the most relevant ones are the ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. After observing the EU programmes, these indicators were discovered as highly emphasized in the YOUTH and Youth in Action programmes. In the YOUTH programme the social learning is understood as "understanding of cultural diversity", "better understanding of other countries and cultures", and "transferring of know-how", "building self-awareness" and "mutual understanding". Moreover, social learning is recognised as one of the main aims of the exchanges: "The general objectives of the YOUTH programme third country cooperation strand … to promote peace, tolerance and solidarity through intercultural dialogue" (Costanzo & al., 2003, p.8). This means that through intercultural dialogue which builds on cultural awareness, will eventually lead to tolerance or cultural acceptance and trust.

Furthermore, the importance of eradicating the ethnic stereotypes is acknowledged through the results of exchanges emphasizing the progress in "intercultural learning and understanding, the abandoning of stereotypes and prejudices as well as the understanding of other cultures. "(Costanzo & al., 2003, p. 9). This corresponds to elements 4. sense of solidarity and 7. empathy, from the SALTO Cultural Diversity's definition of intercultural competences.

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It is evident that the vision of the EU is to build cultural aware societies in the Western Balkans and in the EU Member States, where the knowledge of the cultural differences and similarities will bridge the boundaries of the communities. Thus, the learning will eradicate any cultural gap between the European community and Western Balkans' youth and this is proven by the stated outcomes of the programme, such as - "reducing fear, ignorance and arrogance on both sides" and "increasing knowledge and understanding on both sides" (Slana & Skulj, 2012, p.63). In this evidence can be recognised the elements 3, 4 and 5 from the definition of intercultural competences.

Regarding the second programme, the reports show that the social learning is highly emphasized as an objective of the projects. There is significant evidence, drawn from project participants' statements, which show that through the youth exchanges and volunteer work, youth and especially the youth organisations from the different regions are exchanging practices and adopting new way of doing things: "*We picked up a lot of innovative ideas from our Serbian partners*" (Slana & Skulij, 2012, p. 22). This confirms that the objective of the Youth in Action programme of fostering mutual understanding among the youth from EU and the Balkans has positive outcomes. Moreover, this understanding is also being developed through intercultural learning, for which the content analysis of the programme reports speaks clearly (see Table 8).

Having said that, and after observation of the current programme Erasmus+ YiA, it was discovered that there is much greater focus on building competences for the transition on the labour market, rather than on the cultural aspect of learning. Evidence for this is drawn not only from the coding of the programme guides, but also from the direct opinions of participants, included in the impact reports. From the words of the young people, participating in the youth projects, it is evident that the priorities of the programme are *"too focused on employment"* and the youth demands more focus on reconciliation (Eid & al., 2016, p.5).

This observation could be explained with the worsening political and economic conditions, affecting the social trust of youth in the Balkans. Reports shows that youth are feeling failed by their own society and have the sense of social distance as result of the bad social-economic environment (Jusic; Numanovic, 2017). Given also the fact that the educational systems are not providing the necessary conditions for preparing the youth to become more independent, politically active and ready for the transition to the labour market, the precipitating conditions in the region are not favourable for intra-regional integration. Therefore, the EU had to prioritise the improvement of these conditions and this is outlined in several EU strategies and initiatives, including the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment initiative, all underling the need of boosting the youth employment

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as an important factor for social inclusion (European Commission, 2010; Council of the European Union, 2013; Council of the European Union, 2012).

This said, having in mind the expectation, outlined earlier, it can be confirmed that the EU is enhancing the social learning between the youth in the Programme countries and the Western Balkans with the exception that there has been a shift to more economic aspect of learning in the last programme for the expense of the cultural one. As a result, the analysis revealed that the projects have produced important intercultural competences.

8.5. Expectation 4. The youth programmes provide the condition of social learning among the Western Balkans' youth for building a security community.

As it was argued above, the youth programmes are based on the principle of social learning and are enhancing this process between the EU's and Balkans' youth, understood in the activities of intercultural understanding, exchanging good practices and learning new ways of doing things. Nevertheless, it was expected that the programmes will bring together not only the Programme countries' youth with those from the Balkans, but also will provide a forum for interaction between the young people from the countries in the Balkans. The design of the exchange programmes give the opportunity for more than one SEE country to send participants in one project, which often take place in one of the six Western Balkans countries. The content analysis of the EU programme guides and impact reports did not provide convincing evidence for intercultural learning and exchange of competence among the Balkans' youth. The data in this report were mainly focused on the exchange between the region and the EU community. However, additional data were gathered through analysing the projects that took place during the YiA and Erasmus+YiA programme in the scope of the Western Balkans Youth Window, providing a funding mechanism for the youth sector (Marincovic, 2016). The first programme is not covered because no archives of this period are available. The projects that were funded under the Western Balkan Youth Window, took place in one of the six SEE countries and included participants from two, three or in some cases even four Western Balkans countries. Most projects emphasized the aim of developing intercultural learning and dialogue by fulfilling various objectives- promoting inclusion of marginalised youth, experiencing intercultural communication, raising European awareness, making youth more competent for the labour market by developing skills in project management, self-esteem and team work (European Commission, 2012). Highly prioritized are the intercultural competences understood as building awareness of one's own culture to become open for those who are different. From all the projects under the Western Balkans Youth Window, one third is focused specifically on enhancing the intercultural dialogue and competences. The interactive form of the activities enhances the dialogue and socialisation between youth and the ability to visit

another country from the region and experience its culture, foster even more the process of social learning. Given the historic background of ethnic conflicts, these exchanges are seen by the participants as a unique opportunity for gaining a "meaningful interpersonal relationship" with other young people from the conflict areas which has been defined as experience of peace building and intercultural dialogue (Slana & Skulij, 2012, p.63). The potential of the youth exchanges to stimulate this process is confirmed also by officers from RYCO-

Youth exchanges allow for critical contact among young people… (they) have the chance to question their attitude to learn about other people through non-formal educational methods… feel more connected in the region and overcome certain divides (Interviewee 2, personal communication, June 7th, 2018).

Yet, in the Erasmus+YiA programme the conditions from the previous programme are not transferred. On the contrary, as the transaction density is low, proven by the low number of projects per year, and since the objectives have shifted more towards building labour market competences, there are no sufficient conditions provided for intercultural learning. Furthermore, the non-balanced participation of the six Western Balkans countries in the projects leads to not sufficient result of the intercultural learning in the region (see Figure 5 in Appendix III). Nevertheless, as it will be elaborated further in paragraph 8.7., alternative mechanisms are in place for the aim of building intercultural understanding among youth in the Balkans. These are the regional youth initiatives, example of which is RYCO, providing on local level support for cultural exchanges in the region and for more contacts among the civil society organisations.

Having all this said, the evidence shows that there are conditions for social learning. However, they are not sufficient given the reported low focus on intercultural competences in the last programme, as well as the lower transaction density. Thus, the expectation is partially confirmed.

8.6. Expectation 5: The wide institutionalised settings of the youth policies are influencing in a positive way the conditions for building a security community.

The next sub-chapter will explore the impact of the institutional tools, which the European Commission has applied to the youth programmes, on the process of social learning and density of the youth projects. Also, it will analyse whether a wide network of civil society organisations has emerged. It is worth reminding, that according to Karl Deutsch and confirmed also by Adler and Barnett (1998), the organisations serve as facilitators to the socialisation process, therefore if the European Commission is successful in facilitating the execution of the youth projects through implementing various tools and instruments, this expectation will be confirmed.

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During the YOUTH programme period three instruments were adopted-the Balkan Youth Project, YouthNET and the newly established SEE Resource Centre. These initiatives have been actively supporting the promotion of the YOUTH programme in the Western Balkans and have enhanced the visibility of the programme on the local level (Costanzo & al., 2003). Moreover, these instruments were successful in the support of capacity building of the local non-governmental organisations engaged in the execution of the youth projects on local level, stated in the evaluation report of the YOUTH programme. More specifically, the YouthNet is a network providing coordination between the civil society and the public sector with the active participation of the youth on EU standards, policies and practices in the youth sector.

During the second programme period, the SALTO Youth Resource Centres, consisted of six centres across the EU, confirmed their role as a forum for disseminating information on the projects, as well support and coordination (European Commission, 2007). The Centre is part of the ETS Support Structures together with the ETS Steering Group and ETS Sectorial Working Groups which are implementing the European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action Programme. Moreover, the support structure is contributing for the improvement of the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field. Thus, they are not only important for the improvement of the project implementation, but also for the capacity-building of the civil society organisations engaged with the youth policies.

Further, another instrument- the Eurodesk was introduced to improve the access to information regarding the projects, partnering with Youth Information and Counselling Agency and the European Youth Card Association (European Commission, 2007). Having all this said, it can be confirmed that the programmes' tools are facilitating the process of youth participation. In the current programme Eramsmus+YiA there is even greater emphasize on the improvement of the tools' efficiency and the programme in general. However, the focus is on improving the financing of the projects and improving access and monitoring, rather than the content and the cultural impact of the programme on the youth in the region. It is reported in evaluation reports that the implementation of the projects and the management are low efficient, and the mechanisms are too bureaucratized (Ohana & Mihajlovic, 2018).

These observations show mixed record of results on the impact of the institutional settings. Some of the tools are enhancing the easy access to the projects and the capacity of the youth organisations, nevertheless the general conclusion made from the stakeholders' recommendations on the Erasmus +YiA, is that there is a need of improvement of the programme's efficiency. Thus, it can be concluded that the expectation is partially confirmed.

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8.7. Expectation 6: The youth programmes provide a wide network of civil society organisations as a condition for building a security community.

As it was explained in chapter VII, the implementation of the youth programmes is decentralised, thus the execution of the projects and budget allocation is delegated to the local organisations. After the content analysis of the reports, it was discovered that the regional cooperation of the EU and the Western Balkans' CSOs is complementary to the reconciliation process in the region and the more active youth cooperation. Given the objectives of enhancing the intercultural dialogue and the building of peace and solidarity between the Balkans and the EU, this cooperation in the civil sector have served as a facilitating mechanism.

In fact, there are many regional initiatives for youth cooperation which speaks on its own that there is an increase in the regional interaction and the youth initiatives are facilitating this process (see Table 8). The European Commission set the objective for inter-regional cooperation in the civil society sector during the YOUTH programme and have continuously worked for expanding the partnership during the next two programme periods. The impact report of the YOUTH programme outlines the accomplishments in this context with the "*strengthening of partnerships among organisations of Programme Countries and Third Countries and the establishment or strengthening of associations or groups working for peace, dialogue, tolerance, solidarity, and democracy.*" (European Commission, 2003, p. 10). This clearly speaks for the mission of the network to contribute for the process of reconciliation.

The network has been constantly increasing as new local organisations have been engaging with youth exchanges, trainings and forums (see Table 10). On the one hand, these non-governmental organisation are specifically involved in the execution of the youth projects, given the decentralised character of the youth programmes. On the other hand, some organisations are dedicated to bridging the EU's youth policies with the national governments, thus trying to involve youth in the decision-making and strengthening the sector of civic society organisations. Example for this is the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue which aim at contributing for capacity-building of the CSOs and enabling local or regional authorities to have greater impact on the development of good neighbourly relations, regional co-operation initiatives and, lastly ensuring mutual understanding (n.a., 2015). The platform is an example of bringing together and actively engaging actors from all over the region, since its partner agencies come from FYROM, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Another example for organisation which aims to engage and bring together stakeholder from the region is the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). Its creation is a result of the cooperation between the six Western Balkans governments, which have seen the youth policies as an instrument for

the construct of reconciliation and trust in the region and have incorporated this in RYCO's mission. As stated by an officer of the Office, what the organisation is aiming is to enhance the process of reconciliation and trust building in the region by- "*bring the youth people of the region together and discuss ... the reconciliation and ... the common past and also the common future...*" (Interviewee 1, personal communication, June 7th, 2018). The organisation is an independent institution, however is working closely with the EU. Even though RYCO is still in process of working on its strategic plan, it is already setting projects for youth exchanges in motion (Interviewee 1, personal communication, June 7th, 2018). Given the high number of applications it has received, it can be projected that the organisation will have a leading role in the process of civil society cooperation on regional level. Moreover, it is an evidence for emerging regional ownership, one of the factors, outlined by the European Union for enhancing the regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Also, it is a clear sign that on social level in the region there is already ongoing cooperation. This clearly speaks for the ability of the youth policies to engage the civil societies of the six Western Balkans countries and to build dense network. This is confirmed by officer of RYCO who stated that the people of the region are working together to build a joint future (Interviewee 1, personal communication, June 7th, 2018). The desire to cooperate is expressed explicitly in the high number of projects proposals received from RYCO from all over the region. The role of the EU programmes in this process is crucial, as the European Commission provides financial instruments for capacity-building of these organisations. In addition, regarding the influence which the network has on the youth projects, the impact reports from the YOUTH and Youth in Action programme state that the programmes have had stronger impact when the local organisations were engaged and have brought an added value to the social learning (European Commission, 2003; Slana & Skulj, 2015).

Considering the low transaction and social learning provided in the Erasmus+YiA programme, the role of RYCO is crucial as it provides a framework, specifically containing the mentioned conditions and is exclusively focused on the region.

Having all this said, it can be concluded that the expectation of emergence of dense network of CSOs has been confirmed.

8.8. Expectation 7: The youth programmes are providing the condition of knowledge for building a security community in the Western Balkans.

As it was already explained, the theory of security community outlines the role of common intersubjective meanings as a factor for constructing new understanding of reality and moreover, for building common interests and identities. It was argued that these meanings are recognised in the values

spread by the European Union as a normative power through its Neighbourhood policies. These values are related to freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The analysis of the youth programmes showed that these values, used as indicators for the process variable of knowledge, are available and emphasised in the YOUTH and Youth in Action programmes. Not only they are set as programme objectives, but also are replicated as main topics of the youth projects (European Commission, 2003; Slana &Skulij, 2015). One of the objectives of the YOUTH programme, explicitly stated in the Decision of the Council, establishing the programme, is – *"to de*velop *an understanding of the cultural diversity of Europe and its fundamental common values"* (Commission of the European Communities, 2004, p.7). This has been implemented in the projects by including them as topics of discussions, interactive lectures or various activities. Projects in the scope of the Youth in Action programme have focused on issues like human rights, non-violence, citizenship, overcoming discrimination in all types (European Commission, 2013). Most of the respondents, included in the impact reports, confirm that they have become more aware of the European values as result of their participation in the projects (European Commission, 2010).

Further evidence for the adoption of the European values, especially in the youth policies, is the fact that the EU has significant influence on the creation and implementation of the National Youth Strategy in Serbia and Macedonia. Moreover, the importance of the European values is acknowledged by incorporating these values as standards in the National Strategies. (Azanjac &al., 2014; n.a., 2016). Kosovo's national youth strategy is also a positive example for this as it states that it follows the European standards and practices (Hoxha & al., 2009). Moreover, the officer from SALTO confirmed that not only the values are incorporated in the strategies, but also are reflected on governmental level and even define the relationship between the state and the civil society (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th). Additional confirmation is made by the officer from RYCO by stating that the EU is indeed teaching the Western Balkans youth the European values (Interviewee 2, personal communication, June 7th, 2018).

In the current programme, the content analysis showed that the focus on promoting the European values is still present, however less visible, than in the previous two. Recommendations made by participants in the youth projects and from non-governmental organisations, stressed the need of more support for "human rights and value driven projects" (Skulij, 2016, p.5). Nevertheless, from the interview conducted with SALTO SEE it was confirmed that the programmes are conveying the message of EU values and even if they are not present explicitly, nevertheless they are still incorporated in the projects.

From the evidence shown above, it can be concluded that the expectation is confirmed.

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8.9. Expectation 8: The youth programmes lead to emergence of trust among the societies in the Western Balkans and among the EU and the region as a condition for building a security community.

The expectations that are analysed next, are related to the outcomes which according to Adler and Barnett (1998) would be produced from the positive interaction of the conditions examined so far. As it was confirmed, the youth programmes-YOUTH and Youth in Action- have been successful to great extent in providing the conditions of social learning, interaction and spread of intersubjective meanings or the European values, among the societies in the Western Balkans. Whereas the Erasmus+ Youth in Action has reached only partial results in providing the mentioned conditions. It must be outlined that the network of civil organisations and the institutional settings of the European Commission have positively affected the interaction of these conditions. Thus, according to the theory, it is expected that two outcomes would be produced- trust among the societies and a form of collective identity which ultimately will lead to elimination of the possibility for a conflict in the region. However, as it is explained bellow, the results from the analysis are not convincing for the present of these outcomes. The evidence is taken from the programme guides, impact reports, as well as from public surveys.

The building of trust is highly visible in the YOUTH programme (see Table 7) and is set as programme objective by stating that it aims at building solidarity and fighting the xenophobia and discrimination among youth (European Commission, 2003). Trust is seen as solidarity and tolerance, as well as overcoming the ethnic stereotypes, which if accomplished, would lead to universal peace. Furthermore, it is concluded in the programme reports that the promotion of "universal peace, dialogue, tolerance and solidarity amongst young people" has been a success (European Commission, 2003, p. 45). These are also topics of most of the projects implemented between the Programme countries and the Western Balkans.

The Programme guide of the Youth in Action replicates the objectives of the previous programme since the documents outline the objective of building tolerance and solidarity, overcoming xenophobia and discrimination (European Commission, 2011; European Commission, 2012). A survey conducted during the period of the Youth in Action programme, illustrates that there is an average level of trust in the neighbour countries among the Western Balkans' youth (Jusić & Numanović,2017). However, these results differ in each country as the Serbian, Croatian and Kosovar youth are more trustful in their neighbours, whereas their Albanian peers are less trustful (see Appendix III). Jusić and Numanović conclude that these results are based on the different values and the level of institutional trust together with the level of inclusion in the social institutions among the six societies (2017).

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Given these generalised levels of trust, the impact reports on the YiA programme show positive trends. The respondents from the EU state that they share a high level of acceptance of the SEE, openness for cooperation and mutual learning, and emphasise that the region is part of Europe (Slana & Skulij, 2012). Further, participants in the programme have stated that mutual stereotypes and negative attitudes have been overcome as a result of the youth exchanges – "Young people break the existing stereotypes about young people from SEE (Slana & Skulij, 2015, p.9). The presence of building trust as a programme objective is also confirmed by the officers of RYCO and SALTO SEE outlining the positive impact of the programmes on the emergence of trust (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018). Moreover, as the programmes have definitely expanded their scope throughout the years and more organisations and youth have taken part and have worked on the issues of stereotypes and overcoming the negative attitude, there has definitely been a positive change (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018).

Nevertheless, the results are only partial as the available documents provide only indirect evidence for the produced outcomes. Even, in the reports on the current programme Erasmus+YiA there is no concrete information of the programmes impact on the trust building among the Western Balkans' societies. This is explained by the fact that trust is a concept very difficult to measure, especially in the scope pursued in this research. That is why no research has been conducted on this in the scope of the youth programmes (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th). However, according to the officers from RYCO and SALTO SEE, interviewed for this research, the youth programmes have had a positive impact on the emergence of trust in the sense of the ability to foster the overcoming of stereotypes and prejudices on interpersonal level and also among the actors, taking part in the youth programmes (Interviewee 2, personal communication June 7th, 2018 and Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018). Further, as it was illustrated above, the dense network of actors engaged in the youth policies network suggests that this impact is expanding. As the officer of SALTO SEE suggests, these effects can also *influence in the society of the origin of these people through their changing attitude or different measures they have in their organisations*" (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018).

Moreover, the growing cooperation between the CSOs in the region, and the emergence of RYCO as illustration of the governmental desire for investing in joint endeavors, speak for the emergence of openness for collaboration. Clear proof for this is the wide support among the NGOs in the six Western Balkans' countries. The most recent example is one of the multiple multilateral meetings of RYCO with stakeholders which took place in Kosovo. During the meeting all stakeholders expressed support and willingness for cooperation with the organisation in the field of the youth policies (RYCOWBORG, 2017).

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These evidences suggest that the programmes have been influencing in a positive way the emergence of trust in the region, especially among the actors involved in the youth sector. Having said that and taking into consideration the observations made so far, it can be concluded that the expectation is partially confirmed.

8.10. Expectation 9: As a result of the transaction and social learning, the youth programmes create a collective identity in the Western Balkans as a condition for building a security community.

The last variable from the three-tier framework left to analyse is the emergence of a sense of belonging to a wider community or with other words a collective identity. The analysis of the reports and programme guides, as well as of statements taken from the conducted interviews showed that, a collective identification has been emerging as a result of the programmes. This collective identity is related to the ideas of European citizenship, European awareness and belonging to the European community (see Tables 7, 8 and 9). However, this process has not shown systematic results during the programmes because of the changing political and economic situation, that has been highly affecting this sense of identification.

Raising the awareness of European citizenship is a common and primary objective of the EU youth programmes. Yet, in the context of the cooperation with Partner countries in the YOUTH programme there is not sufficient emphasize on raising the awareness of European citizenship, evident from the content analysis. Also, no impact reports emphasize the emergence of an awareness among the youth of the Neighbouring countries in regard to concepts such as the European citizenship or even European identity.

However, the reports on the Youth in Action programmes speak differently. It is reported by participants, as well as in the official documents of the Commission and the SALTO SEE that the projects from the Youth in Action programme are influencing the emergence of European identity and awareness of the European citizenship as these topics prevail among the projects (Slana & Skulij, 2015). Participants from the Balkans share that participation in the projects has actually "led to strengthening the sense of European identity" (Slana & Skulij 2015, p.15). Interestingly, the reports show that the projects have influenced the perceptions of the youth from EU Member States to reach a high level of acceptance of the Balkans and consideration that the region should be part of the European Union, which serves as a favouring factor for the emergence of sense of commonality.

Nonetheless, a different sense of community is emerging from the participation of the programmes based on the exploration of the common history and culture. The interviews with officers from SALTO

SEE and RYCO also confirmed that this feeling of shared culture and history is being explored (Interviewee 2, personal communication, June 7th, 2018; Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 5th, 2018). Furthermore, the potential integration in the European Union is also reported by the interviewees as a uniting factor for an identification in terms of a common future.

Contrastingly, an impact report on the Erasmus+ Youth in Action published in 2017, reveals very different results. It is stated that the young people from the Western Balkans cannot identify themselves with the concept of European citizenship or belonging to the European community (Topalli, 2017). The report outlines the abstract nature of the European citizenship which makes its understanding more difficult. The observation of the officer from SALTO SEE explains the difficult identification with the tendencies of rise of nationalism even in the European Union Member States, as well as due to distant perspective of the region's accession to the Union. In this sense, the identification of being European causes division, as well as perspective for common future.

Nonetheless, in general the programmes indeed have been successful in awakening the understanding that Balkans have a lot of in common in terms of culture and traditions, as well as the past and future which is seen from the statements of the young participants (Slana & Skulij, 2012; 2015). So, by exploring of self and the other, and the different and similar cultural and political traits, the sense of belonging is being constructed. Since the reports outline the perspective of common belonging to the European community, one can assume that with the reconfirmation of the perspective for accession and European membership of all the countries in the Western Balkans, this process will be fostered. Another crucial factor for the success of this identification is the adoption of the European values. As it is confirmed by the conducted interviews, the values hold the potential for changing the social construct of the reality as well as for constructing a collective identification (Interviewee 2, personal communication June 7th, 2018).

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Findings.

The table below illustrates the results of the analysis translated in confirmation, lack of confirmation and partial confirmation of the expectations drawn in Chapter IV.

EXPECTATIONS/ CONFIRMATION/LACK OF CONFIRMATION	YOUTH	Youth in Action	ERASMUS+ YOUTH IN ACTION
E1: PRECIPITATING CONDITIONS	*Lack of confirmation*	*Lack of confirmation*	*Lack of confirmation*
E2: DENSITY TRANSACTION FLOWS	*Partially confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*	*Lack of confirmation*
E3: CONDITIONS FOR SOCIAL LEARNING BETWEEN EU AND WB	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*
E4: CONDITIONS FOR SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE BALKANS	*Partially confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*
E5: INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS INFLUENCE POSITIVELY THE PROCESS CONDITIONS	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*	*Lack of confirmation*
E6: WIDE NETWORK OF CSOs	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*
E7:EU SPREADS COLLECTIVE LIBERAL INTERSUBJECTIVE MEANINGS	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*	*Confirmed*
E8: DEVELOPING TRUST	*Partially confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*	*Partially confirmed*
E9: EMERGENCE OF SENSE OF BELONGING	*Lack of confirmation*	*Partially confirmed*	*Lack of confirmation*

Table 3: Confirmation of expectations.

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IX.   Discussion

This chapter provides an overlook of the findings and answers the research question and the sub-questions, formulated in the beginning of the thesis.

> *"Politically this (youth programmes) is the main tool for peace building in that area."*

This quote is taken from a participant who have taken part in the youth projects. It speaks clearly for the meaning and importance that the programmes give for the young people in terms of improving the relations among the societies. The analysis, provided in this thesis, have confirmed that the European Union's youth programmes are providing opportunities for socialisation between the EU and the Western Balkans, and inside the Balkans, given the fact that before their introduction the interaction among the countries inside the region and with the EU were either not existing or extremely difficult. Nevertheless, this confirmation is only partial as several insufficiencies have been recognised related to the programme implementation- the insufficient financing, ability to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised youth and problematised access.

Regarding the conditions of knowledge and social learning, set as variables in the three-tier framework, the programmes have been designed specifically for fostering these conditions by spreading the European values and improving the social and cultural competences of youth. Yet, the analysis revealed that the changing economic and political situation in Europe highly affected the programme and this has led to a low visibility of the intercultural component in the current programme. Despite that in the first two programmes, there was a strong emphasize on the spread of EU values, promoting reconciliation and fight against stereotypes and prejudices, in the current programme- Erasmus +Youth in Action, the previous accomplishments are not present to the same extent. The programme is more complexed, the mechanism for applying of organisations in the projects are stricter, the information is less accessible and there is a general lack of attention to matters like reconciliation and building trust and tolerance. Yet, the high unemployment and economic insecurities are recognised as factors, negatively affecting the social cohesion which is why they are being treated with the programme.

In this sense, the partial confirmation of some of the expectations are not because of lack of relation between the conditions and the youth programmes, but due to the low efficiency of the programme design and implementation. Nevertheless, if looked in general terms, the programmes are indeed providing the conditions set as variables in the theoretical framework.

Further, regarding the third tier of the framework, the programmes are to some extent successful in overcoming the ethnic prejudices among the Western Balkans and are effective in integrating the

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Balkans countries to the European community. Still, the interviews highlighted that it needs time to see clear results in the trust building and the construct of sense of belonging. Yet, the process of resolving the wounds of conflict past and ethnic stereotypes in the Western Balkans could be said that is already in motion. Locally, in the recent years the local ownership in the Western Balkans has increased, giving crucial role to the CSOs like RYCO to fight with the stereotypes in the region and work for establishing of peace as ultimate outcome. This comes to say that the youth policies have great potential of resolving conflict attitude and increase reconciliation, or in other words- building trust. Nevertheless, on its self, the networking and partnerships built by the CSOs in the region, as well as integrating different stakeholders such as local authorities, governments and universities comes to say that the regional cooperation in the field of youth policies has increased and is going to expand even further. One could assume that the latter would expand the processes, thus reaching bigger part of the societies. Interestingly, the reconciliation in the region has been supported also by the Berlin process, which sets as objectives of cooperation with the civil society and youth, next to the economic governance, bilateral disputes and social affairs. Therefore, this not only confirms the important role the youth policies have for the regional cooperation and reconciliation, but also suggests that it has highly contributed in this context.

9.1.   Answering the sub-questions.

The aim of this thesis was to test whether the youth programmes are serving as a community building practice and to analyse this, the following research question was formulated-*Can the EU's youth initiatives in the Western Balkans be understood as an application of the constructivist security community theory*? Before answering this, through the evidence gathered so far and synthesized in the discussion, the guiding sub-questions drawn in the beginning has to be answered-

1. Does the EU perceive the youth policies as an integration tool?
2. How does the Union look at the Western Balkans in relation to its own security?
3. What does the EU want to achieve through the youth policies in the Western Balkans?
4. Do the youth policies provide the conditions for building a security community?
5. Do the youth participation and exchanges result in constructing collective identity in the Western Balkans and intra-regional trust?

The European Union definitely sees the youth policies as a tool for enhancing the integration of the Western Balkans. The factors that confirm this are several. Firstly, the youth programmes which were analysed, included as objectives the raise of sense of European citizenship and the spread of the EU values, which are indicators for building connectivity with the European community. Secondly, as confirmed by the aims of the Berlin process, the youth cooperation is crucial for the reconciliation,

regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, all accession conditions, set in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the Western Balkans. Connected to the integration of the Balkans, is the strengthening the security of the European Union, as it is perceived that by reforming the region, the Union will stabilise its borders and will ensure its own security as a result. This has been confirmed from strategic documents on the enlargement perspective for the Balkans and the conducted interviews.

Regarding the third question, which concerns the aim and objectives of the youth programmes, it was revealed that they correspond to the objectives, outlined in the context of the integration of the region. Despite the fact that the youth cooperation with the Partner countries follows the general objectives of the youth programmes inside the EU – creating a "Europe of knowledge", creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment, as well as enhancing the active participation of the youth in the society, the cooperation with the Third countries adds to these the strengthening of civil society and democracy, as well as the promotion of peace, tolerance and solidarity through intercultural dialogue. These objectives brought the expectation that the youth programmes could prove to be an example of community-building practice between the societies, according to the security community concept of Karl Deutsch. After examining the programmes aim, objectives and implementation, the variables set in the three-tier framework were recognised. Despite the insufficiencies found in the implementation and design, the YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+Youth in Action programmes provide the process and structural conditions.

Nevertheless, the analysis did not reach to convincing conclusion in regard to the theoretically prescribed outcomes of trust and collective identity. Yet, the evidence revealed that there is definitely a positive impact on the latter, however more time is required in order to observe any concrete results. Also, there are factors, negatively influencing the community-building and the construct of social fabric. The economic and political instabilities, the reproducing of negative narratives by the media in the region and some parts of the political elites, as well as the raising nationalism in Europe, are all diminishing the effects of the youth initiatives.

Nonetheless, it can be concluded that indeed the youth programmes are contributing for the community-building in the Western Balkans, thus the answer to the research question, whether the EU's youth initiatives in the Western Balkans could be understood as an application of the constructivist security community theory, is definitely affirmative.

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X.   Conclusion.

This chapter provides reflections on the research aims and objectives, as well as on the limitations, faced during the research. In addition, suggestions for further research are made at the end.

The research in this thesis was focused on the impact of the European youth programmes in the Western Balkans. As it was explained in Chapter V, the collective instrumental case design that was chosen, combined with the logic models and pattern matching methods served not only for evaluating the programmes to test whether the theoretical conditions were available, but also how these conditions were provided. This way the expected outcomes of the programmes could also be examined, as well as the factors that influenced the results.

However, the research aimed to understand more- about the theory of security community and the youth policies. Thus, the instrumental nature of the collective case study allowed to fulfil some of the research gaps in the field of youth participation. As the analysis revealed, the youth engagement can have a positive influence on the community - building process, as well for the integration towards a wider community such as the European Union. Most importantly, it was concluded that the youth have a great potential to unite an ethnically divided region and thus set the fundaments for the establishment of stability and peace.

Crucial insights through this research were gained on the Western Balkans, as well. It is evident that region is definitely on the path of overcoming the legacies of the past conflicts. Even though more time will be needed to see clear results, the process is already going. The crucial factors that definitely facilitate it are the engagement of the international community, but also the exploration of the common culture that the countries from the region has.

Furthermore, the research accomplished the task of expanding the theoretical framework of the security community and thus enabled to apply it for a societal analysis. Thus, the research is pioneer in focusing on the societal interaction in the scope of the security community, which despite the fact that is highly emphasised in the theory, was never analysed in-depth. This was done through the various theories which were used to further explore the variables in Chapter IV. Therefore, it can be said that this research has elaborated a modified model based on the framework of Adler and Barnett (1998) and has reached an analytical generalisation.

Nevertheless, during the research, several limitations were faced. The theoretical framework was one of them, as it is the only existing model for operationalisation of the security community theory. This limitation was overcome through the modified model, as explained above. Another limitation occurred during the data analysis, as it came clear that the available data did not enable to distinguish

the immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcome, prescribed by the logic models. Since the outcomes are quite abstract concepts, their availability was argued in general terms.

Given all these considerations, the applicability of the modified framework could be tested in further research on other youth initiatives, as well as on initiative in other specter of the civil society. A survey method could complement the insights on trust and collective identity.

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Appendix I: Literature review of the youth participation

AUTHOR	COMMUNITY-BUILDING IMPACT	POLITICAL IMPACT
TERRY BARBER-	Effect: sense of belonging to community	
GUTIÉRREZ AND CHECKOWAY	Youth as "agents of change. Effect: social connectedness and creating changes in the environment	
HILFINGER-MESSIAS AND KERRY MCLOUGHLIN	Building awareness and commitment for improving the conditions in the community	
BEN KIRSHNER	Effect: Forming collective identity (relevant for political integration and building sense of community)	Ability to influence political changes
BERNSTEIN	Effect: stigmatized identities, are challenged, recognition for new identities or deconstructing restrictive social categories (relevant for political integration and building sense of community)	
MEHMET NURETTIN ALABAY AND MELIH RUSTU CALIKOGLU	Effect: stereotypes and prejudices among youth are overcome and as a result intercultural dialogue and trust are built. (relevant for political integration and building sense of community)	
SHAWN GINWRIGHT AND TAJ JAMES		Effect: alter the local political cultures, new program implementation, policy change, and institution building (influencing the political elites- bottom up effect)
DANIEL HOSANG		Effect: challenging the dominant political discourses

Table 1. Expectations of the potential effects of youth participation.

Youth in action.

Appendix II: Literature review of the variables.

Author	Transactios	Social learning	Organisations and institutions	Knowledge	Trust	Collective identity
Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett	Transactions as forms of exchange in which actors learn the relative value of things, establish new bonds, establish reciprocity and provide the foundation for trust.	Learning as creating new interpretations of reality based on new knowledge.	Provide institutionalised settings facilitating the transactions and social learning.	The shared meanings created out of practice. Most relevant to the conflict resolution and development of mutual trust are the values of liberalism and democracy.	The confidence that disputes will be settled without war	People identify their fate with the others' but also differentiate the collective with other out-groups.
Karl Deutsch	Through transactions a social fabric is created. Relative growth of transaction flows in economic, trade and culture context among societies rather than inside them.	Not defined.	Need of some kind of organisation on international level. The existence of sense of community would strengthen the existing international organisation.	Cognitive constructs or intersubjective meanings related to the liberal democracy and market values.	Mutual responsiveness and predictability of behaviour.	Collective identity as sense of belonging and we-ness.

Author[4]/Variables Youth in action.	Transactions	Social learning	Organisations and institutions	Knowledge	Trust	Collective identity	
Bruce Russett	1.The level of transactions must be high relative to transactions within Each subsystem.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	
David Puchala	Transactions are dealings between states of an economic or political nature.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	
Alexander Wendt	Not mentioned.	Alter-Ego presentation	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	1. Calculations of the other's behavior. 2. Elicitative trust.	State-centered 1.Common fate 2.Homogeneity 3.Interdependence 4.Self-restraint	
Etienne Wenger	Not mentioned.	Active participation in practices of social community and constructing identities.	Not mentioned.	Result of the Interplay between Personal experience and community competence	Not mentioned.	Not mentioned.	

. Table 2: Literature review of the five variables adopted from the three-tier theoretical framework of Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. Adopted from: Adler & Barnett, 1998; Wendt, 1992; Deutsch, 1957; Wenger, 2000; Russett, 1970; Puchala, 1970; Weller, 1991

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[4] Authors are listed in alphabetical order upon their surname.

Youth in action.

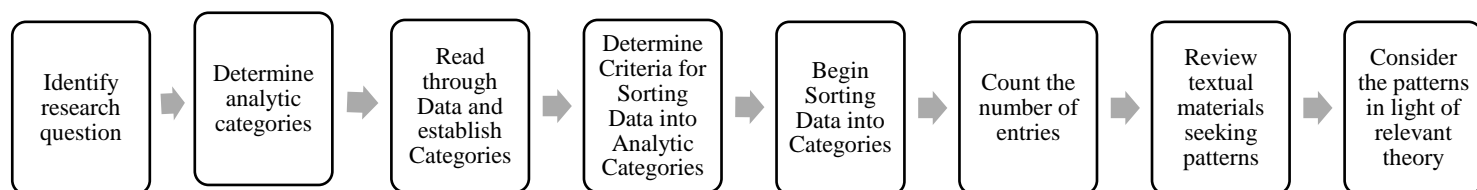## Appendix III: Elements of the qualitative analysis.

Figure 5: Stage Model of Qualitative Analysis. Adopted and Retrieved from: Berg, B. (2009) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Pearson Education. This figure shows the different stages of the qualitative analysis, which were replicated in this research.

3.1. Results from the content analysis.

Variable	Indicator	Codes	Pattern	Frequency	Availability
Social learning	System of sharing practices and competences, gaining new meanings and abilities, intercultural learning	Mutual understanding; Bridging the cultural gap; Exchange of good practices	1.Europe of knowledge; 2. social learning; 3. intercultural learning 4.crossing the learning boundaries	11	Yes
Knowledge	EU values, democracy, rule of law, active participation	Promote respect for human rights;	knowledge	4	Yes
Organisations and institutions	Networks, partnerships, tools	Developing civil society; Strengthening partnerships	Network-building, Institutional settings	5	Yes
Transactions	Number of projects, access	Structural initiatives; projects	Exchanges, projects	3	Yes
Trust	Overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, tolerance	Tolerance, solidarity; combat xenophobia; abandon stereotypes; Building lasting partnerships	Solidarity, trust, tolerance	6	Yes
Collective identity	EU identity, sense of common interests, common future	European citizenship	Sense of belonging	2	Partially

Table 7: Coding results for YOUTH programme.

Youth in action.

Variable	Indicator	Codes	Pattern	Frequency	Availability
Social learning	System of sharing practices and competences, gaining new meanings and abilities, intercultural learning	societies based on common understanding; inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue; different perspective	1.Europe of knowledge; 2. social learning; 3. intercultural learning 4.crossing the learning boundaries	11	Yes
Knowledge	EU values, democracy, rule of law, active participation	Reflect European topics;	knowledge	4	Yes
Organisations and institutions	Networks, partnerships, tools	Create new networks;	Network-building, Institutional settings	3	Yes
Transactions	Number of projects, access	Increased participation; dialogue;	Exchanges, projects	4	Yes
Trust	Overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, tolerance	Fight against racism and xenophobia; post-conflict resolution and recosntruction and regional cooperation	Solidarity, trust, tolerance	9	Yes
Collective identity	EU identity, sense of common interests, common future	Awareness of being European	Sense of belonging	7	Yes

Table 8: Coding results for Youth in Action programme.

Youth in action.

Variable	Indicator	Codes	Pattern	Frequency	Availability
Social learning	System of sharing practices and competences, gaining new meanings and abilities, intercultural learning	Increased appreciation of cultural diversity;	1.competences 2.intercultural learning 3. exchange of practice	14	Yes
Knowledge	EU values, democracy, rule of law, active participation	Appreciation of cultural diversity; promoting fundamental EU values	EU values;	2	no
Organisations and institutions	Networks, partnerships, tools	Capacity building of CSOs; application and access; funding; partnerships with different sectors;	Network-building, Institutional settings	19	Yes
Transactions	Number of projects, access		Exchanges, Mobility	3	Yes
Trust	Overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, tolerance	Tolerance remain fragile;	Solidarity, trust, tolerance	1	no
Collective identity	EU identity, sense of common interests, common future	Lack of European awareness;	Sense of belonging	2	no

Table 9: Coding results for Erasmus+ Youth in Action (up to 2017)

Number of Youth Exchanges granted at centralised level by country and year								
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Albania	4	3	1	1	1	4	7	21
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	5	8	3	5	9	4	38
FYRo Macedonia	21	28	20	17	20	19	28	153
Kosovo	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Montenegro	2	1	3	3	1	3	3	16
Serbia	8	12	10	15	11	16	21	93
Total	39	50	43	39	38	51	63	323

Figure 6: Number of Youth Exchanges granted at centralised level by country and year. Adopted from: Slana, & Skulij, 2015, p.25)

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Figure 4.1. The extent of trust on a 1–10 scale

Legend: Family members · Relatives · Friends · Neighbors · Colleagues · People of different religion · People with different political beliefs · Religious leaders
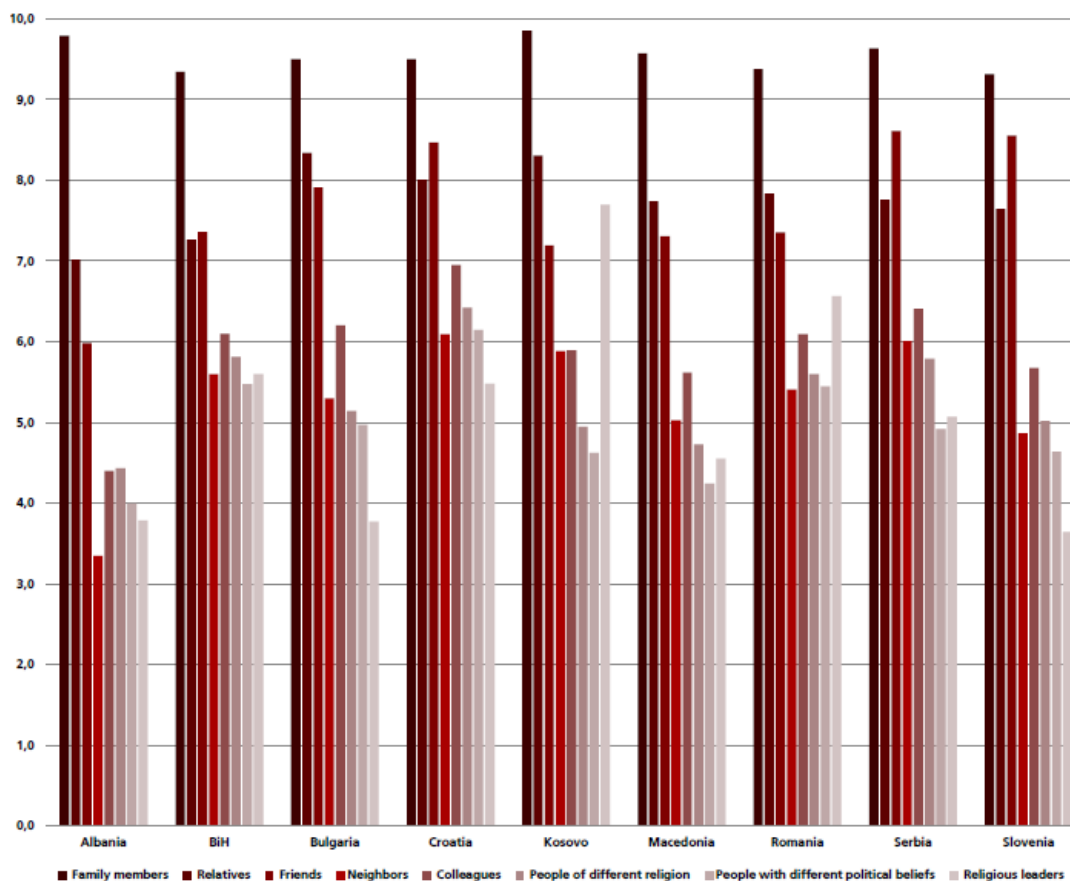
Figure 7: Level of trust among the youth in Southeast Europe. Adopted from: Jusic, M.; Numanovic, A. (2017) The excluded generation. Youth in Southeast Europe, p.28. *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe.* Retrieved from: library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/13780.pdf

3.2. Extraction of the case study database.

Sample	Variables	Indicators	Explanation	First cycle coding	Second cycle-Pattern coding	Variable frequency	Available
p.7 Objectives: promote active citizenship, develop solidarity and promote tolerance to foster social cohesion in EU, foster mutual understanding between youth in different countries	trust, social learning	understanding, overcoming the negative attitudes	stereotypes and discrimination are in the basis of negative attitude and exclusion	citizenship, solidarity and tolerance; understanding.	trust as tool for social cohesion; social learning;	social learning -11	yes

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Priorities: reflection on the emerging of European society	community	EU visions society over nationalities	community	European society	European society	knowledge-4	yes
facilitating joint activities of young people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds	interaction	activities	joint activities in which youth participate actively	joint activities	interaction	transactions-4	yes
sense of belonging to the European Union	EU identity	sense of belonging to a wide community	developing a sense of common interests and future	sense of belonging	EU identity in creation	collective identity -7	yes
p.31 Developing intercultural learning	social learning	gaining understanding and competences	Eu emphasize on learning as cultural understanding	intercultural learning	social learning	trust-9	yes
p.84 Youth in the World aims: to promote dialogue, mutual tolerance, intercultural awareness and solidarity beyound the borders of the EU	social learning, trust in bigger community	awareness and understanding of differences, overcoming the negative stereotypes		intercultural awareness and solidarity; mutual tolerance.	social learning and trust	expectation for peaceful change - 4	yes
Break down prejudices and stereotypes, build up societies based on common understanding and respect.	trust, social learning	overcoming stereotypes, understanding	building tolerance is closely connected to understanding and acceptance	social learning, solidarity	social learning and trust	network -2	yes
p.87 Priority will be assigned to projects targeting the following thematic subjects: strengthening civil society, citizenship and democracy	knowledge	promoting liberal values	the projects aim at "teaching" the youth of liberal values	liberal values and democracy	knowledge		
p.87 Fight against racism and xenophobia	trust	promoting fight against stereotypes					
inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue	socialisation			intercultural dialogue	socialisation		
post-conflict resolution and reconstruction and regional cooperation	expectations for peaceful change	overcoming the conflict behaviour and past	building the bases for the emergence of peaceful expectations	Reconciliation; regional cooperation	expectations for peaceful change through reconstructing the peaceful relations		

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Combination of series of Activities aiming to create new networks, or strengthen existing ones under the Youth in Action programme	organisations and institutions		creating networks through the youth programmes	network building	network building		
p.19 Participants change behaviour, it makes change in one's life by pushing the limits of prejudices and self-awareness	building trust	overcoming the negative attitude	youth change their attitude as result of overcoming the stereotypes	1.overcoming prejudices and stereotypes	building trust		
"Last summer a Serbian girl after exchange her best friend was now a Bosnia girl	building trust	tolerance, bonding	building connections between different ethnic groups	1.friendship	building trust		
p.22 "Bosnian way-one learn to accept the modern way of doing things"	social learning	practice and competence sharing		1.learning new ways	social learning		

Table 12: A 10 % extraction of the case study database.

This table illustrates the coding process performed on the Youth in Action programme guides and reports. Due to the vast amount of data kept on excel sheets, only a representational sample is provided here.

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<h3 style="text-align:center">Appendix IV: Actors and instruments of the network for youth initiatives on regional and EU level.</h3>

Framework or organisation	Project or instrument	Aims
Berlin process

Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) | Western Balkan Youth Cooperation Platform | -to enhance regional youth cooperation through establishing a collaboration platform among youngsters and youth organisations in the Western Balkans.[5] |
| Erasmus+
European Union | Western Balkans Youth Window | - to encourage policy dialogue, cooperation, networking and exchanges of practices in the field of youth, such as **conferences, workshops and meetings**;[6] |
| Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue | Balkan youth forum | - "knowledge, advocacy, monitoring skills development and information share among CSOs and local/regional authorities for enabling their greater engagement and impact on good neighbourly relations, regional co-operation initiatives and ensuring deeper common understanding, transparency and local ownership over the accession process".[7] |
| RYCO
Berlin process | PILOT Open Call for Proposals | -To foster exchange of experiences between young people to form new ideas for the future of the region, contribute to the better understanding of human rights, initiate intraregional exchange and cooperation, foster trust building between youth from different ethnic groups[8] and reconciliation in the region. |
| Balkan Youth Festival „Youth of the Balkans " | "The Balkan Youth Today – Future for Europe Tomorrow | The biggest forum for cooperation and understanding of young people from the countries where disagreement has been the basis of relations.[9] |
| 18 partner organisations all over the Balkans | Divided Past – Joint Future | -To improve and strengthen internal capacities from the regional CSOs in order to effectively advocate for reconciliation action in the Western Balkans and Turkey |
| Erasmus+
European Union | Western Balkans platform on education and training | -provide a regional platform for policy dialogue on education and training issues of interest to the participants and in which the results of the OMC will be presented
• share good practice and experience among the participants
• evaluate EU assistance
• identify further needs for support |

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[5] Retrieved from: http://connecting-youth.org/about.php

[6] Retrieved from: https://cetplatform.org/2015/03/05/western-balkans-youth-window/

[7] Retrieved from: http://www.alda-balkan-youth.eu/About

[8] Retrieved from: http://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=3828

[9] Retrieved from: http://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/organisation/944508595_bg

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		• promote regional cooperation.
Humans of Albania and Serbia	The Human Rights Youth Forum	-promote cooperation between countries of Albania and Serbia; promote prevention of any violence, hostility and discrimination[10]

Table 10: Youth projects on regional and EU level.

Preciitating conditions	European Commission Albania 2018 Report. 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018 Report. Regions. *European Commission*; 2. Kosovo 2018 Report; 3.Montenegro 2018 Report. ; 4.Serbia 2018 Report. ; 5.The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018; 6. Albania 2018 Report.
YOUTH	1.Council of the European Union (2002) (C 168/2) Resolution of the Council 2.Interim Evaluation of Third Country Cooperation of the Youth Programme 2000-2002. Final report. 3. Final External Evaluation of the YOUTH Community Action Programme 2000-2006. Final Report
Youth in Action	*1.Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-201)8; 2.A Mapping and Comparative Assessment of Youth Organisations in the Western Balkans. An Insight to Youth Organisations and Youth Policy in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. Regional Policy Paper* *3.Impact of the Cooperation with SEE within Youth in Action programme.;4. (2015) Impact of the Cooperation with SEE within Youth in Action;5. (2014) Youth and Public Policy in Serbia. ; 6. European Commission (2007). Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide. ;7. European Commission (2008). Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide. ;8. European Commission (2009). Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide.* *9. European Commission (2010). Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide. ;10. European Commission (2011). 11. Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide. ;12. European Commission (2012). Youth in Action Programme. Youth in Action 2007-2013. Programme Guide.* *13. European Commission (2010) Qualitative Impact of the Youth in Action Programme. Report of the 2010 Survey;14. European Commission (2011) Impact of the Youth in Action Programme. Monitoring report.15. Bruin & al. (2011) Final Report. Youth in Action Interim Evaluation. ECORYS*
Erasmus +Youth in Action	1.n.a. (2015) Erasmus + Youth in Action Forum for the Western Balkans Region. Recommendations. *SALTO South East Europe Resource Center* 2.Connecting Youth Work and Youth Policy. Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting. Final Report RYCOWBORG (2018) RYCO Supports First Projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 3. Exploring Erasmus+: Youth in Action Effects and outcomes of the ERASMUS+): Youth in Action Programme

Table 11: List of the programmes documents analysed for gaining primary data.

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[10] Retrieved from: http://youthumans.net/about-us/what-is-hoas-all-about/

Appendix V: Transcription of interviews
A joint interview with officers from RYCO

Interviewer: Thank you for participating. I will try to stick to your schedule as you requested, and I will start with my first question. As you know the interview will be recorded if you do not have any objections on that and afterwards I would like to transcribe it.

Interviewee 1: We are completely fine with that.

Interviewer: Perfect! Let's start then. My first question is: <u>Why the Western Balkans are important for the European Union and does the European Union aim at strengthening its own security through the enlargement with the Western Balkans?</u>

Interviewee 1: Yea, of course, the first and most important thing –why the Western Balkans is important so much for the European Union is that basically part of the European Union and it is obviously that when you look at the political map of the EU you will see that the Balkans is missing there. And this is first of all a natural thing that the Balkans belong to Europe and the European Union and is the reason why it is so important for the European Union. Also, it's important in ah security terms because ah you know the consequences of the wars during the 90's here in the Western Balkans had a lot of influences and consequences throughout Europe and the European Union. And is also important to keep the region stable and secure because not only for the Balkans itself but for the reasons of the European Union.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you so much. We will move to the second question. Would you say that the Western Balkans are ready for regional integration and what are the conditions that the region has made significant progress in or actually lacks significant progress?

Interviewee 1: When it comes to the regional integration and regional cooperation I would like to answer this question from the point of view from us, from RYCO. So, we basically launched our first open call for project proposals in October last year and we received more than 420 applications from all over the Western Balkans that had more than 1300 different civil society organisation but also high schools. That's a clear sign that the region basically the people from the region really want and they need to cooperate in order to connect and network to build joint future. Ah, not only in the Balkans but also towards the European Union. So, from that point of view I would like to say and underline that the region is not ready, it's already cooperating and there is basically desire of all the civil society and the educational institutions to cooperate and to deepen the relations between the people in the Western Balkans. Ah, when it comes to conditions, could you just specify what you are referring to.

Interviewer: let's say that condition set by the European Union?

Interviewee1: Well, the conditions set by the European Union are political in terms of building the rule of law, strengthening the institutions and so on. The situation in the Western Balkan varies from one society to another. So, in that sense it should be deeply analysed and it should not be just said in that sense that the Western Balkans are meeting or not the criteria. But, more or less, yeah, in the Western Balkans there are a lot of societies are lacking the rule of law and the stable institutions and that's one of the key issues that the governments will have to deal with.

Interviewee: Alright. Let's move further. How do youth policies can be beneficial for the society and do the policies influence the intra-regional relations?

Interviewee 2: Hum, yeah. Ah, so Neli, I will join on the question of youth policies. The first of all, the youth policies are cross-sectoral. They are dealing with the youth as the main target but also

as the main barrier of changes in the society. And as such, they cover different areas-from employment, to education, social inclusion, mobility etc. So, whenever those youth policies take into account different aspects of life of young people and prepare them and empower them for the present role in their societies which is also the role of active participants and decision-making processes, democratic process in one country, then they can be certainly beneficial for the entire society. Hum, when it comes to the second question- whether the policies influence the intra-regional relations, yes, pretty much or I mean they could. In the region by now there has been a cooperation among different countries when it comes to youth policies. Hum, but this is definitely the cooperation that we would like to see more enhanced, ah, and we will actually would like to see at a certain point a some aspects of youth policies that could become regional policies. So, ah, these policies could refer to specifically the areas that we are working on and to be related to mobility, intercultural dialogue, reconciliation and so on.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you. Next, what does the European Union want to achieve in the Western Balkan through the youth policies?

Interviewee 2: So, yes, this is for example something that I don't understand your question. What do you mean, through which youth policies of EU are you referring to?

Interviewer: Let's say, I should have specified that I am looking at the three youth programmes – YOUTH, Youth in Action and Erasmus+ Youth in Action. So, through these programmes and the different projects and the aims of these programmes, what do the European Union wants to achieve?

Interviewee 2: Ah, I actually thing this is more a question for someone who is working on these programmes and you could find this information in the programmes. So, I wouldn't like to answer this question.

Interviewer: Alright, then…

Interviewee 2: Well, I am speaking in very general sense but there is factual information that you can find.

Interviewer: Yes, I understand. Let's skip the next question also and do you think you could answer the sixth one- What does the European Union wants to teach the Western Balkans 'youth?

Interviewee 2: Ok, one of the most general, let's say, narratives when it comes to what does the EU want to teach the Western Balkans'youth is European values and these values are mainly related to human rights democracy social inclusion and so on. In short this will be the answer and then of course I mean when speaking of all these the EU certainly would like to see more cooperation among young people in the region which is why we are receiving EU support.

Interviewer: Alright, let's move to the next –Does the growing network of civil society organisations and their relations with the European Union and the National Agencies affect the impact of the youth programmes?

Interviewee 2: Again, this is the question regarding the National Youth Agencies and I think it should be addressed to them. Because this is not in the scope of our work. We have some cooperation with national agencies, also with civil society organisations, but I don't think we are the right persons to answer this question.

Interviewer: Ok, let's move further. Would you say that there is connection between the civil society and the youth programmes?

Interviewee 2: Are you again referring to EU funding mechanisms?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee 2: Again in my opinion this is not relevant, because I can say only generally that the ones using the funding are civil society organisations and in these countries they do not work only with young people, they also work with other populations. So, it could happen and probably happens a lot that there are a civil society organisations that are using "Civil society facility" -one of the EU programmes structured for the civil society and youth programmes within Erasmus+. So, you know the connection could be many, you could speak on the level of connection between them when it comes to being the user of certain programme, but there can be many other connections. May be , you know , there are these different capacity building programmes for civil society organisations and they also target even at sometimes youth organisations specifically, or smaller organisations , so there are intertwined . But again, I don't think this is the scope of our activities.

Interviewer 1: I would like to answer to this question that you can look at different perspectives of these connections between civil society and youth programmes. Because at some point civil society is let's say a watch dog of not only the user of those programmes, but also a watch dog how the programmes are created, in certain way. Because they are giving some recommendations how the proramme should be changed and for me will be really interesting to see somebody from the European Union to say how they are incorporating these recommendations from the civil society which are trying to influence the programmes. So, certainly there is some connections between the civil society and the youth programmes in different ways, but I think you should focus more on some concrete relations between them to explore more. If you are speaking of usage of the prorammes or the influence of the programmers and so on. And the right people to ask are the people from the civil society organisations, but also the people from the European Union who are creating the programme.

Interviewee 2: Then also the other angle of viewing this question would be to what extent are the organisations from the Western Balkans included in the creation of the youth policies and the commenting these policies, but you know this is another question whether we are talking about structure or other things.

Interviewer: Let's move to my tenth question. What is the mission of RYCO and you mentioned earlier in one of the emails that RYCO is preparing its strategic plan, what are the opportunities and external threats to the Organisation?

Interviewee 1: Yeah m, basically RYCO is internationally oriented non-governmental organisation created by the governments of the Western Balkans and it was founded by signing the agreement on establishing of RYCO in 2016 on 4th of July when the six prime ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia signed the agreement. The key aim of RYCO is to promote the spirit for reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through exchange programmes, so basically what RYCO is trying to do, aiming to do now, is to bring the youth people, the youth of the region together and discuss different topics that cover really huge areas when it comes to discussions. So, starting from the reconciliation and the discussions about the past and ah the common past and also the common future, but also through discussions regarding the active participation and social inclusions. So, these are key areas which the first projects are supporting. We published couple of days ago the final list of the supporting programmes that you can find on our web-site. So, may be for you will be also interesting to go through our web-site to check the final list. There you can find also some shot descriptions of the projects and you can see also what we are supporting. But also, when it comes to the strategy planning, we are currently in the phase of local consultations. We first organize the strategic conference, we got more than 100 participants from the Western Balkans including representatives of civil society, from national and regional organisations, but also governmental representatives that gave the first inputs for the strategic conference. And after these, we continue with a local consultation where we are

now defining some concrete parts of the mission and vision of RYCO but also how the strategic plan should look like for the next three years. And I would like to basically give you some insights from our addressed strategic plan that is currently under consultation phase around the Western Balkans but basically one of the key points is that we would like to focus on principally, providing young people from across the region with the opportunities to build much more understanding and reconciliation , civic social educational culture and sport sector and also we would like to make RYCO able to participate in policy initiatives and to advocate for reform. We also want to support for political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchange and pursuing its mission we would like to see RYCO able to demonstrate its commitment to human rights, human dignity and building of peace and mutual respect and trust. So, this is like, in really short what we are trying to shape as RYCO's strategy for the next three years.

Interviewer: In this context, do you have anything in your mind that you can be expected as a threat in the sense of connecting youth from the different countries with may be still the ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, so in this sense.

Interviewee 1: Yes, for sure there is a worrying statistics when it comes to for example ethnic distance among the young people from the region and it is quite challenging point on which we have to focus a lot an work with different stakeholders to basically overcome these stereotypes and prejudices that are basically growing and nobody was really systematically dealing with them in the last couple of decades. So, it is also really important to highlight the potential of media that can reproduce and also, broaden, deepen the negative narratives and the hate speech among the young people from the region. So it is not only about RYCO and how RYCO will overcome these, and say that RYCO cannot change the region alone, it has to work with other different stakeholders, including governments, media, educational institutions and we should all together work on the same aim of bringing the young people together and explain them why we share common things, not only in history and present, but also in the future.

Interviewer: I would like to focus my next question on the media. To what extent do you believe the media is independent from political influence?

Interviewee 1: Again, it is like a common trend in the Western Balkans that you can see in different reports conducted by different regional and international organisations, dealing with press freedom and media freedom. And you will see the trend that there is a lacking media freedom in the region and the fact that you could really easily see this in different researches. So, I think these speaks for themselves quiet obviously and clear that the region really needs more independent media.

Interviewer: I will move to my next question and I will change it a bit and will ask you: To what extent do you believe that the youth exchanges can foster the intra-regional, cultural and social connection ns?

Interviewee 2: Well yeah, I guess we will both answer to this question. So, ah, first of all, youth exchanges allow for critical contact among young people and allow them to go to a territory where they haven't been and allow them to experience also to have a first had experience of new environment, of new people, living in those environments, of new cultures and so on. And through these direct opportunities these young people have the chance to question their attitude to learn about other people through non-formal educational methods used in these youth exchanges and through different programme activities which are taking place with different projects. And they can actually start this process of questioning of their prejudices and stereotypes. So, this is in the shortest way to which these projects are useful for making young people feel more connected in the region and overcome certain divides.

Interviewee 1: It's also, there is also a lot of information about the other, it also important to meet the other peoples, but also is really important to start realizing that we are, especially in the Western Balkans, when we are speaking about those intercultural exchanges, is that we mostly share the same cultural roots and quite a lot of common customs and staff like that, and is really important to start seeing our neighbours as somebody who has a lot in common with us. We currently have, it is my personal impression, that we have this situation where the young people not only don't know anything about the culture or customs of their neighbours, but they also don't have the information about their lives, how they are spending their time., what is the political situation in the neighbouring country, or how they are dealing with some things that could be of interest of young people from every country. I also believe that is important to start besides these things that we are speaking about, I think you can also foster connections, because we could start being interested in what is going over there with our neighbours that we usually don't care a lot about and simply don't have, we are not used to have that type of information about them.

Interviewer: In these exchanges they include socialisation between the young people, what problems do you anticipate of young people having during this socialisation?

Interviewee 1: First of all, it's a… part of the old cultural exchanges that you have that initial cultural shock at first glance and is not a … very pleasant thing to experience, especially if you are having it for the first time. And that is one of the key things that usually if you bring two groups of young people from two different let's say countries or societies they will meet together, they will be happy and so on. And they usually always forget to think about especially in these areas where there where a lot of conflicts in the last couple of decades that people can experience not always good experiences but also some stressful situations in terms of getting to know that somebody can have a different perspective of a certain history or culture or whatever. So, it's also a way to explore that.

Interviewee 2: Also, you can see where there is a cultural … in some country they don't have to be interregional, it could be due to the language, due to the social background due to a sub-culture. So, there are very different reasons for which there could be certain …ah, how did you… I don't remember now how you framed it –misunderstanding or… whatever…

Interviewer: Yes, socialisation or communication.

Interviewee 2: Yes, that can hinder the communication. It could be due to different reasons. What you have in theory is cultural iceberg when we have a full set of … under the surface, they are not visible. Even for young people they are confront with someone who have different set of… and they cannot be visible even to those who are working with them because they don't have to be visible on behavioral level. But once you get to discussions and that is actually the purpose of these young exchanges that you see what is under the surface. That is something that you normally see in the process of communication.

Interviewer: I would like to ask you also to what extent you think that the local governments are ready to face those problems that you already mentioned in regard to ethnic stereotyping and the cultural shock. So, do you think the local governments are understanding that and they are willing to face that and try to overcome those problems?

Interviewee 2: So, first of all, we did not do any assessments of the situation on the local level so it is difficult to speak about that from evidence based perspective. But what we could hear with our working experience is that in some communities local authorities are pretty much favouring this kind of exchange and kind of projects. And those are most of the times those communities which were hit by strong conflicts. So, in our previous work we have examples for those coming from Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. But we cannot speak in general, it is very difficult

to speak in general. What we could say is that it is absolutely important that those who are implementing the projects, who are the ones engaging into cultural mediation among communities or among countries that they are really supportive to those projects. That they are actually by doing that by being supportive they are the ones assuring sustainability of those projects. Because there are different kinds of mechanisms, possible mechanisms of support of municipalities to young people that can be through youth clubs, youth centers, cultural clubs and so on and so many others , and if they are willing to , they can definitely contribute to more sustainable intercultural work , ah, in these communities.

Interviewer: Alright. To what extent do you believe that openness of the local governments is affected by the political desire of integration to the European Union or is it equally is affected by the desire for regional cooperation and resolving the neighbour's problems?

Interviewee 2: I mean, this is also very broad question. Because you can say that in general the effects of European integration agenda and the effects on behaviour of governments are more visible of national level and at local level so I t will be difficult to say. We are not really, we do not have the evidence of who contributes to what extent to these intercultural exchanges and second question would be what the drivers for this support are. First of all, we need to know who is working on these issues and how is inside. It could be the European integration process the thing promoting these values of peace and so on and intercultural understanding, but it could be as well that these local authorities at their level understand how important it is at local level that these communities go well together and in peace.

Interviewee 1: I would like to add also that, probably that again is just assumption, I cannot speak from an evidence-based research or something like that. Ah, but probably there is difference to which the local communities are focusing on. If you are probably at some community at border area and if it especially a border area with the European Union then probably there is some difference between them and the local communities that are in the centre of a country that don't have any connections with other neighboring countries, doesn't matter if they are from the EU or not. So it also probably depends on which specific local communities you are trying to focus but also a lot of history and historic background is really important to have it in mind.

Interviewer: Thank you. My next question I think is also broad but could you answer it: What do you think, can the youth exchanges have impact on the political integration of the Western Balkans countries?

Interviewee1: They can certainly have at least some influence on the political integration of the region and you can make some parallelism with what we are trying to do and the result of the Franco- German   adolfiest [11]that highly contributed to the reconciliation between people of Germany and France and without these bright young people that was … for years, I really doubt that there would be this kind of relations now without this work. So, in other to see the influence of these intercultural exchanges of youth people we really have to work long and really continuously and hard to basically to pick the fruits of your work and to see the results. Because, the changes they are not happening overnight and they cannot even happen just in years, a few generations of young people and also as we said previously you have improve different stakeholders, it is not only important to bring the young people together, but is also important to change narratives in the governments in media in schools in university about the others, the neighbours that you are trying to build relations with. So, it is really important to engage as much as stakeholders and young people who are shaping their attitudes about their neighbours. In general, yes, it could have really huge

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[11] The author assumes that the subject is referring to the Franco-Germanic treaty of friendship.

influence but we cannot do it and bring the people to integrate the Western Balkans, we need more people involved.

Interviewer: In this sense, do you believe that the youth organisations can connect these stakeholders?

Interviewee 1: Yes, they can for sure. And not only the youth organisations but also what we are trying to do now, to bring different stakeholders on one track doing the work that aims to do the same thing. So, that is the reason why we are building a lot of partnerships with different international, regional organisations, also with local civil society organisations, but also with universities, media, governments, ministries, dealing with youth policies. So, we are also trying to build this network that is really important for these changes to happen.

Interviewer: I will ask my last question, what do you believe, is it possible through those youth exchanges, young people to start thinking as Europeans, or as part of the Balkans community , rather than as an Albanian or Serbian etc.?

Interviewee2: Yes, so I would answer this one. It is always nicer to think more broadly so if you take young people from the Western Balkans they certainly feel as European, and even more importantly, I hope they feel as citizens of the world and they are not bounding themselves into different let's say political narratives or different kinds of divisions and even geographical divisions. And I really believe that once you start understanding what another culture is once you really discuss, what human rights mean for you then you can understand that these are not only European concepts, but are concepts that are present in the entire world. I hope that these young people that go through these programmes really broaden their horizons and don't bound themselves to this continent where we live.

Interviewer: I am sorry, but I have one more question. Do you think that as these youth exchanges by bringing youth together to get to know each other and their culture, could actually enhance the regional security?

Interviewee1: Of course. Its obvious think of you are having friends and you are knowing more about your neighbours is less probably that there will be some problems between them. It doesn't mean that we will heal the wounds and that we will make eternal peace in the Western Balkans, but we will for sure lower the risk and basically increase the security in the region by bringing the young people together.

That was my final question. I would like to thank both of you for participating, if you have any questions to me or remarks, please you can say them now. And if you could also send me an email with the details of your colleague that would be great.

Interviewee 1: I will send you the link and feel free to write if need something more from us.

Interviewee2: And if there are some aspects of what we mentioned that you think that might give you more detail and we probably have it written then feel free to ask us.

Interviewer: Perfect. After I include your answers in my research, do you mind if I mention your names or I can for sure keep you anonymous.

Interviewee2: I think it will be better if it is anonymous.

Interviewer: Perfect. So, thank you again, I wish you very success with your work and again thank you so much!

The conversation ended.

Youth in action.

Interview with officer from SALTO SEE Resource Centre

Interviewer: Thank you for being willing to participate with this interview. If you have any questions before we start, please share them now…

Interviewee 3: No, I do not think I have. I have checked before these questions that you sent me.

Interviewer: Before we start I just wanted to check if you have anything in mind if I voice record this interview and also if you would like your identity to remain anonymous.

Interviewee 3: Yes, in this case it will be better, because we would have a different procedure if any of inter centre that any of us have participated in this kind of research.

Interviewer: Okay, there is no problem. Then I suggest we start I will ask my first question and will follow the question protocol that I have sent you. So, my first question is –How successful is the EU in accomplishing the objectives of the youth programmes, namely-'strengthening civil society and democracy, promoting peace, tolerance and solidarity through intercultural dialogue'?

Interviewee 3: Yes, these are the main objectives of the programme that are in the field of youth and ah… these objectives are of course very broad. So, whether they are successful or not it must be assessed to relation to this possible impact of these measures. So if we talk about in the level of the whole society it is very difficult to say what the causal relations of different things that influence are and ah… also we are talking about concepts, who are very difficult to measure. Nevertheless, according to this research of the impact of the programme that we have conducted here in the Western Balkan region, we have discovered that there has been positive impact on different levels of the programmes from individual level to more systematic levels. And we can see these impacts from changing attitudes of young people to capacity-building of the organisations, which are involved in these projects, to also to a more policy level, meaning a better dialogue with the young people and youth policy makers. And these topics- intercultural dialogue, peace tolerance ah... these are also in our research and have been outlined as effects of young people taking part in these projects. And ah in a more political level these topics have been reflected in inter policy level and also the key actors promoting the programme have been recognised by the national policy makers. These are also have been the results of this impact study that we have made seven years ago on the effects of these programmes. And a I have to mentioned that this impact study was made in the previous programme, before the Erasmus + there was another programme Youth in Action, but nevertheless we can assume that these effects are similar because the activities that are possible to conduct within the Erasmus + programme are not that different than what was possible in the previous programme. So, this impact we believe is also valid under the activities of the current programme.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you. Let me ask my second question- how do you explain the shift in the objectives of the current Youth in Action programme? Why have the explicit focus on intercultural learning been lost? My question is based on the research of the programme guides.

Interviewee 3: This current programme, so the Erasmus+ programme responded to these challenges that were brought by the economic crisis from 2008 towards so at the time when the programme was developed these effects were already visible among the societies in Europe. So the programme also put quite a lot of effort and emphasis on preventing young people's social exclusion which was considered to become quite large to some extent from these economic hardships that the young people were facing. And also a lot of attention was put to employability of young people and because of these ah… aspects such as more value-based elements of civic initiatives were less emphasised in the programmes' priorities. But this doesn't mean that they would not be there but maybe they were not that visible because these other aspects were more prevalent. And ah... these intercultural components especially was not lost completely because it innovates always in transnational cooperation.

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Interviewer: In this sense, let me rephrase- whether the emphasis on improving the cultural relations between the societies in the Balkans in the sense of overcoming the stereotypes and prejudices, is that actually lost in the current programme?

Interviewee 3: I would not say that it's lost. I mean… what the priorities and cooperation with the Western Balkan region are not different really from other general priorities and the general priorities are of course reflecting what is considered to be the most important in the EU agenda at the particular time. And like I said when this economic crisis has hit in, these aspects of social exclusion and employability became very much important. But I would still say that the intercultural component was not completely abandoned because it is not may be as explicitly prioritised as what the projects should address directly but is nevertheless it is present in the implementation of these projects.

Interviewer: Let's continue with the next question- To what extent the civil society organisations, engaged with the youth policies, have contributed for improving the regional cooperation?

Interviewee 3: These organisations that have taken part in the projects under these EU programmes for youth they have contributed to the regional cooperation. Since many of these projects they don't include partners only from other European countries, but they also include partners from the region. So you can have projects with partners from let's say Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro and so on, so this means that also these organisations and these people have been brought together within these projects. And in this way, it can be said that ah… that also the civil society organisations have contributed for improving the regional cooperation. And there has been also significant amount of exchange of practices and networking among these actors in the field of youth which have been triggered by these Erasmus+ programme and cooperation in that framework.

Interviewer: Could you say that through this cooperation between these organisations they bring the societies close to each other?

Interviewee 3: Yes, I would say. Because you bring organisations together which are working on projects Based on commonly identified needs and these projects- the aim of these projects is to influence on the societies that are involved in these projects and in this way if you have project partners which have common aims that they are trying to advance this can be said that leads to improving this kind of regional cooperation.

Interviewer: My next question is - What is the scope of the youth programmes in matters of level of participation in the Western Balkans' societies? Have the programmes been able to engage more youth during the years? (Since 2000 when the Western Balkans were given the opportunity to participate in the youth policies)

Interviewee 3: This number of participating organisations since 2000 have increased really a lot. So, in the beginning in 2000 it was very difficult to engage organisations to take part of the programme at that time and also the number of partnerships was in general quite low as a consequence of that. And it was also difficult for the organisations to find people who would be willing to take part, but however over the years and there has been also a lot of support from the side of the European Commission to support the cooperation and these programmes have really taken off in cooperation with the Western Balkans' region. So, currently there are I would say quite a lot of projects with the region which actually don't even get granted because the offer is more than the financing available, so It has increased really a lot.

Interviewer: Could you say that since the EU youth programmes the inter-regional and intra-regional cultural and societal connections have been significantly improved?

Interviewee 3: Definitely the programmes have positively influenced on interpersonal level among the young people in the Western Balkans and like I said before these are quite broad issues in this way that

is difficult sometimes to assess if you have had a personal impact on a young person to what kind of impact would have on the society as a whole. I am not saying that there is no impact, I am simply saying that it is difficult to measure as it is a broad issue it is hard to say what the cause is and what is the consequence. However, this cooperation within these projects have brought people closer together and in this way, this has contributed to the reconciliation also, which was a big issue after the conflicts in the 1990s. And I would also say that these programmes have brought young people closer to their European identity.

Interviewer: Thank you. This is actually a partial answer to two of my last questions. The next question is- how are the programmes affecting the social awareness of the youth? (By social awareness is meant the understanding of the mutual similarities and differences among the ethnic groups?)

Interviewee 3: Well, these projects under the programmes are often addressing topics such as intercultural or interethnic understanding and this have definitely has had a positive effect, and on the other hand no matter what the topic one project has, this interaction between people from different contexts that contribute to the development to these kinds of understanding. So, I would say that they have had influence.

Interviewer: So, this is also an answer to my next question whether the programmes have improved the dialogue between the youth in the countries of the region.

Interviewee 3: Yes, true.

Interviewer: Okay. The next question- To what extent the programmes have provided a forum for the young people from the region to exchange experience, learn from each other and develop more cultural understanding?

Interviewee 3: I would say there has been a lot, because not only within the region, but also together with their peers from the other European countries. Because this is what the programme does, it gives the ability to people to come together and ah… in that settings, the young people come together within these projects it is exactly this that it gives them stage to exchange their experience and also have that personal development in terms of increasing their intercultural understanding. Because how these projects work is that the young people actually get a real chance to meet others from other countries and from other contexts.

Interviewer: To what extent the programmes have successfully promoted the European values among the societies in the Western Balkans?

Interviewee 3: These programmes, they aim at conveying the message of the EU values and as they are present in many different ways such as in the topics of the projects, but not only that. Also, as a code of conduct in handling these projects, meaning for example that the management of these projects must respect the rule of law and this is one of the central EU values. In this way, if the EU values are not explicitly pronounced, they are still in many ways present in these projects.

Interviewer: Is it applicable that these values have been transferred to national level through the National Youth Strategies in the six countries of the Western Balkans?

Interviewee 3: According to this impact study which we made –one of the findings that we had was that these programmes how different values were articulated there, were actually adopted in the National youth policies. And also, I would say that on more political level these programmes represent policy-making and measures which are based European values. So in this way how the programme is represented and what it represents, is according to how European values are understood in the EU context and ah… this is then reflected in the governance and how the relationship between the states is with the people and with the civil society. So, in this way the programme just by existing and bring it

accessible to these countries can influence on these European values in being communicated at least into the national context.

Interviewer: Thank you. My next question is - Are the programmes affecting the ethnic categorisation (meaning the differentiation between the ethnic groups and, the related to this, ethnic stereotyping) and are they fostering the emergence of trust among the societies in the region?

Interviewee 3: I would say, yes. These programmes they do promote equality and inclusion regardless of one ethnic background and therefore, they do convey this kind of strong message countering such phenomena. And ah… like I said before, there is definitely strong impact on trust in the interpersonal level among young people and the actors involved in the field of youth and taking participation in the projects. And one can assume that this can also then influence in the society of the origin of these people where they come from through their changing attitude or different measures they have in their organisations afterwards.

Interviewer: In this sense, could you say that since 2000 until now there has been a positive change in the overall perceptions among the societies?

Interviewee 3: In the level of the whole society is difficult to say, because the overall situation, the political, the economic situation in the Balkans has changed in the time when these programmes has existed and many things have influenced on that. And in some ways different kind of tendencies or trends can be seen like it can be seen in other European countries that there can be this tendency of rising nationalism and may be hostile attitude towards people from other countries. In this way I would not be able to say that overall, yes, the attitudes and the feeling of trust have only been increasing. But then again, what is happening in the society as a whole, it's a different thing than what has been the impact of the programme. So I believe that since the programme throughout the years it has been expanding and there have been more and more organisations and more and more young people taking part and since these issues are so central in the programme, countering any kind of ethnic stereotyping for example, I do believe that throughout the programme getting more influential, also there has been a positive change in this regard.

Interviewer: Alright. My next question – could it be claimed that claimed that a feeling of belonging to a wider community is being created among the Western Balkans youth and among the societies in general? In this sense, have a "we" narrative been created in terms of common interests and perspective of common future?

Interviewee 3: Well, these EU youth programmes they are instrument of European integration in the field of youth and in relation to this all of the Western Balkan countries, they all have a common perspective towards joining the EU and in this way the participation in these programmes can function as a unifying element practically, but also symbolically. And also the participation in the programme crate opportunity for the organisations and individual participants to reflect the similarities and differences that countries have had the Western Balkan region has a whole to relation to the other countries. And what we have for example notices is that often it can be seen that the commonalities between the Western Balkan countries are emphasised. So, many common needs, many common kind of contexts or realities where young people live can be identified and there are many common traditions that can be celebrated or common problems that can be found also. And these kinds of things too promote this feeling of unity. So I would say, overall, the programme has had an effect in that as well.

Interviewer: Could you say that the Western Balkan youth are actually seeing themselves as European… not exceptionally but additionally to their national identification?

Interviewee 3: I would say that the programme has had an effect to this direction, so uh… this question is quite ambivalent because we have witnessed the fact that the western Balkans countries are not part of the EU and this often brings this question whether the young people can feel European because these

are often considered to be the same. Because this EU context through the programme is very strong. It does not have to be that European means only the EU, but this question often comes connected to these activities. So… my observation is that there are both kinds of feeling among actors involved, that feeling of division of Europe, that comes mainly from the fact the Western Balkans' countries are not part of the EU, but on the other hand it also often come that there is that feeling of shared values, shared history, culture that often is a big discovery for people that take part of these projects. And they see that actually they are not that different. So, I would say both-there is that feeling of division and feeling of unity with the rest of Europe.

Interviewer: Thank you. My final question is- could it be claimed that the youth programmes are fostering the societal integration of the region, as well as the process of building stability and security

Interviewee 3: I would say-yes. Yes. And may be yes on the basis of what we have already discussed. But, referring to everything we have discussed, yes, the programmes have this kind of effect.

Interviewer: So in this sense there is no perception that a conflict could happen in the region anymore?

Interviewee 3: I would not say that, this is possible, because of what usually what happens is a result of quite complex political or geopolitical issues that are behind it and also young people are affected, so I would not say that the youth programmes have had such a big effect that any kind of negative societal phenomena would not be possible any more, but definitely participation in this kind of programme is a counter force for many possible phenomena that that could advance this kind of negative events like radicalisation. So participation in these programmes is definitely a counter force, although it would not be so influential to stop something like that happening.

Interviewer: Thank you! These were all my questions. After we finish today I will send you the transcription and if you have any further question, you can contact me any time. Wish you all the luck with your work!

Interview ended.