

The road to developing Porto Youth Strategy 4.0

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In 2009, Porto was the first city in Portugal to develop a Municipal Youth Plan thus paving the way for the recognition and quality development of local youth policies. In December 2019, Deputy-Mayor for Youth, Catarina Araújo, announced to Porto Youth Council the will to develop Porto Youth Strategy 4.0, giving continuity to the previous 3 Porto's Municipal Youth Plans (2009, 2011 and 2017).

To tell us about the journey to creating the Strategy, talk about the significance of local youth work, encountered challenges and new opportunities for advancement, we sit down with Deputy-Mayor for Youth and Sports, Catarina Araújo.



Q: Tell us about the journey to creating Porto Youth Strategy...

CA: We began designing **Porto Youth Strategy 4.0** in January 2020. The main goal has been the **co-creation of a new youth strategy, strengthening youth participation and youth work**. Regarded as a quality development process, **#YouthUpPorto Roadmap - Project Design to Develop Porto Youth Strategy 4.0** focuses on 4 work themes and packages: **research, capacitation, information and participation**.

#YouthUpPorto Roadmap builds on the inspirational work from the Council of Europe Youth Strategy 2030 Roadmap, OCED «Soutenir la Participation des Jeunes dans la Vie Publique Locale à Salé, Maroc – Guide pratique», EU-CoE Youth Partnership «Youth Policy Essentials», as well as previous Porto experience, among other sources.

It seeks to co-create a **youth-centred, goal-oriented strategy, connecting Porto youth policies and programs with the Portuguese National Plan for Youth, European Commission Priorities, EU Youth Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Porto submitted an **Erasmus+ KA3 application** in February 2020 for **#YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue**, began interviewing local, national and international stakeholders, fine-tuning **#YouthUpPorto Roadmap** and established a **peer-review group** with four organizations from Porto Youth Council, the National Youth Council, National Federation of Youth Organizations, Portuguese

Institute for Sports and Youth, ERYICA, European Youth Forum and OECD. In March, COVID-19 pandemic forced a lockdown in Portugal and we had to reschedule of all activities.

Set to be completed in November 2020, the co-creation of Porto Youth Strategy 4.0 is a work in progress with the continual rescheduling of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the process is moving forward and generating positive impact. #YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue was approved by the Portuguese National Agency Erasmus+ Youth in Action. The peer-review group gave positive feedback to project design. #YouthUpPorto Roadmap was finally presented to Porto Youth Council in July 2020 and unanimously approved by the 55 youth-led organizations participating in the meeting. In September, the Municipality organized Plan B: Participatory Democracy Lab – the first capacitation activity; and during the Fall started the series of 8 Porto Youth Work Webinars; began digital youth work activities with Debate Your City: Youth Policies and celebrated Global Education Week 2020 with the Focus Group Global-Local Youth Perspectives.

Between 18-19 December, Porto hosted the first round of #YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue - 18 hours long online marathon to engage young people, municipal staff and decision-makers in the co-creation of the Youth Charter 4.0 – establishing a concept for youth, approach to youth as an opportunity, values, mission and vision.

The process is currently due to be completed by May 2021 for the approval by Porto Youth Council and the Municipality. The second round of #YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue co-created Porto Youth Goals and SMART targets (29 Jan – 27 Feb), and the third round will develop an Action Plan/toolbox focused on citizenship learning, youth information, youth participation and youth work (19-20 March).

Porto will partner with Europe Goes Local City of Braga to co-organize a National Meeting for Local Youth Councils; host a training course on the European Youth Forum's Quality Standards for Youth Policies together with the National Youth Council and continue thriving for youth participation and quality development of youth work and local youth policies.



Q: What are the Strategy's purpose and desired impact?

CA: We would like to create an inspirational process for everyone involved. Designing Porto Youth Strategy 4.0 is an opportunity and a quality development process. Some of the goals include discovering ways to **enhance the life quality of young people in Porto**, to support them in **empowering themselves as agents of positive change**, to **increase youth participation in democratic processes**, **strengthen cooperation with youth organizations** and **support the quality development of youth work and youth-centered youth services**.

Of course, we have had numerous examples of the positive impact such as we have welcomed **24 new member organizations and 10% rise of participation in Porto Youth Council in 2020**, numerous new partnerships and projects - first Erasmus+ project of the Municipality of Porto (KA3), overall improvement of planning, assessment and reporting processes as well as process linked to EU Youth Goals and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. We feel reinforced confidence in Porto Youth Division thanks to #YouthUpPorto and the resilience to cope with COVID-19 pandemic and push forward.

Q: How does the Strategy align with the European dimension of youth work?

CA: #YouthUpPorto Roadmap seeks to connect Porto Youth Strategy 4.0 with local – national – European quality standards and best practices while enforcing European values.

The Roadmap was influenced by the inspirational work from the Council of Europe, ERYCA, EU-CoE Youth Partnership, Europe Goes Local, European Union, European Youth Forum, OECD, Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth and the United Nations.

#YouthUpPorto combines lessons learned from Erasmus+, Youth Dialogue, shares responsibility with Porto Youth Council, and opens up the debate towards **co-management of local youth policies**. The process and the upcoming Strategy are aligned with CoE Youth Strategy 2030 and EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 to «engage, connect and empower youth».

We also interviewed Jonas Agdur, on behalf of Europe Goes Local Steering Committee in an early stage of the process and this opportunity reinforced the desire for a flexible, goal-oriented strategy, underlying the importance of youth work, setting indicators for quality development, bringing youth and the municipality together, opening youth participation to a 360° degree vision of local policies. Young people should set the youth agendas. Life quality for young people should be built on the indicators prioritized by young people and strengthen equal opportunities. #YouthUpPorto invites young people to collaborate with decision-makers, municipal staff and local stakeholders, raising their awareness to continue the process of building democracy.

Portugal has five cities in Europe Goes Local network: Braga, Santa Maria da Feira, Cascais, Odemira and Portimão. Porto invited the first three for #YouthUpPorto peer-review group, and Braga and Santa Maria da Feira joined the project team (4.0 Commission). Currently, Porto and Braga are working together to co-organize a National Meeting for Local Youth Councils, together with the Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth, National Youth Council and the National Federation of Youth Organizations. Porto is willing to strengthen cooperation with European Cities, Europe Goes Local, the Portuguese National Agency Erasmus+ Youth in Action, hoping the future can bring the possibility to be an effective member of EGL network.

Q: What have been some of the main challenges you came across during the process and did some of them turn into opportunities and/or good practices?

A: Designing a youth strategy is always a challenge. Making it in the midst of a pandemic was mission impossible. Porto accepted the challenge and we are learning and growing from the experience.

In January 2020, we started designing an open, collaborative and participatory process to engage young people, decision-makers, municipal staff and local stakeholders in the co-creation of Porto Youth Strategy 4.0. Porto learned from the previous three experiences and respected the tradition to push for new boundaries.

The **first challenge we encounter is capacity building in the Municipal Youth Division**. The team has four youth officers and there is a **need to further develop youth work competences**. A **combination of training activities and hands-on / learn-by-doing process** were combined to build confidence and competences. All training activities are open to youth, youth workers and peers from the municipality. **Peer-learning** opportunities with colleagues **from other Municipalities** were also set in motion.





The **second biggest challenge was communication and outreach**. Young people only participate in what they know, hence specific attention to spreading the work in online and offline channels. Porto planned #YouthUpPorto Kick-off event to raise awareness; used the **International Youth Day for a social media campaign** to showcase **local youth-led Sustainable Development Goals projects**. Again, COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns forced delays and cancellations. It also captured and continues to capture all media attention since March 2020. Nevertheless, Porto website published 21 news during 2020, **Porto Youth Council connects more than 100 youth organizations**; the Municipality contacted 50 local high-schools, 3 local universities, 8 inclusion projects, local artistic, cultural and sports organizations, among other stakeholders. With mixed results in terms of awareness and participation, the process allowed Porto Municipal Youth Division to assess the way it was working youth information and youth communication, beginning to improve some processes. There is a rising perception between some young people and local stakeholders that the Municipality is creating a great opportunity for youth and doing its best.

The **third biggest challenge was youth participation**. With a **growing debate surrounding the state/quality of democracy and youth democratic participation**, it was vital for #YouthUpPorto to **catalyze active citizenship and democratic culture**. Porto Youth Council participation in 2019 was down to 36%. Many high-schools in Portugal, indefinitely postponed student unions elections due to

COVID-19. The lockdowns in March - June 2020 and Dec 2021 mean many young people are feeling trapped at home. Youth unemployment, mental health, poverty, inequality are raising issues. Schools closed, restarted online, reopened, closed again. Youth organizations cannot run activities and there is less funding available. Are people willing and able to participate in democratic processes, youth dialogue, non-formal learning, co-creation labs, local youth policies?

The **fourth biggest challenge was a digital transition**. Digital youth work and smart youth work were some work packages Porto Youth Strategy 4.0 should explore in the coming years, but COVID-19 pandemic forced the whole world to go digital overnight and wake-up some kind of expert. #YouthUpPorto started interviews going to Cascais to meet the President of the European Youth Forum in January 2020. In March, all interviews had to shift to online. This actually helped rethink and scale-up, **allowing contact with Europe Goes Local, ERYICA, Klaipeda 2021 European Youth Capital, OECD**. In October 2020, as capacitation and participation activities were ready to start, a partial lockdown was enforced and Debate Your City 2020: **Youth Policies had to be adapted to an online version** with two days to go. That was the first online activity of the Municipal Youth Division and since then all activities have been online. After a «panic attack» the team embraced the challenge, **rethought and scaled-up Porto Youth Work Webinars to national meetings** (with some international guest-speakers); started online meetings for Porto Youth Council; **adapted Global Education Week 2020 and #YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue to digital labs**. We are learning more and more about digital youth work and exploring possibilities for smart youth work in terms of assessment, data and knowledge. (Still very much looking forward to offline activities, though...)

All things put together, the biggest challenge was definitely working during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Porto has the tradition, the youth, the youth organizations, the local stakeholders, the resources, the reputation to do a creative and inspirational process and youth strategy. Political will, leadership, competence and resilience mean we are still moving forward, pushing boundaries and learning from the experience.



Q: Could you share with us what the significance of local youth work is and how do you make sure you maintain the quality development of local youth work?

CA: Youth work has tremendous potential for young people, communities and democracy. It supports young people to empower themselves, gain a sense of belonging, explore their creativity, develop local impact projects, engage the community, understand and accept others, contribute to a working process called Democracy. That potential has to be unlocked and, hopefully, the Bonn Process and Europe Goes Local can provide some guidance in that direction.

Youth policies, youth work, youth participation all happen at the local level. It is at the local level that young people are and it is important that European and national strategies and funding recognize this fact and invest in networking and competence development of local authorities, both elected representatives and municipal workers. Political will, leadership and competence are paramount for youth work to thrive.

Regarding Porto Youth Strategy 4.0, round 3 of #YouthUpPorto Erasmus+ Youth Dialogue will develop an Action Plan, a toolbox of resources. Young people, decision-makers and municipal staff will discuss solutions for non-formal learning program for active citizenship, support mechanisms for the

innovation and sustainability of youth organizations, youth information plan and youth participation mechanisms.

Porto will join young people and youth organizations to discover what youth work means to them and how can we ensure the resources for quality development. Also, what should be the role of the Municipality, youth organizations and young people to fulfil Porto Youth Goals / Porto Youth Strategy 4.0.

At the Municipal Youth Division, «Improving youth work – your guide to quality development» and the European Charter on Local Youth Work are already being used to rethink quality indicators and assessment tools for our Activity Plan 2021 and Balanced Scorecard. Porto Youth Council and new youth labs to co-create and evaluate youth policies can be further explored, as well as impact assessment.

Q: What are you hoping to achieve and expect in 2021?

CA: #YouthUpPorto is challenging and supporting young people to widen-horizons, discovering new realities and possibilities. It is a living lab of resilience that proves that where there is a will, there is a way to find solutions and make dreams happen. In 2021, hopefully, a restart of the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy as a tool for quality development of youth participation, work and policies and after having it wrapped up, have it approved by Porto Youth Council and Porto City Council. We hope to support the Bonn Process and be part of Europe Goes Local. We hope it's a year of learning, doing, sharing and enjoying! And most importantly, hopefully no more COVID-19 ever and going on a holiday!

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