



Office for European Expertise
and Communications

Capacity of Youth Non-Governmental Organizations and Initiative Groups for Cooperation in Addressing Common Objectives

Executive summary



Секторный анализ

достоверные данные

для осознанных решений

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Objectives of the Analysis

The analysis of the sector of civil society youth organizations, including the role and influence of their environment, is one of the sectoral analyses that the Office for European Expertise and Communications (OEEC) has been conducting since 2012. The aim of this analysis is to summarize the existing expert and scientific data regarding the development of specific sectors of the Belarusian civil society, and complement it with quantitative and qualitative studies of the aspects, which have not been studied so far.

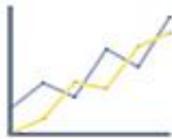
OEEC expresses its appreciation to the non-profit organization Pact for the idea of conducting periodic analysis of civil society sectors in Belarus, and for its support in the development of the methodic and methodological basis of sectoral analyses.

OEEC highly appreciates the contribution of the representatives of non-governmental organizations: Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, Brotherhood of Organizers of Student Self-Governance, Historica, Discussion and Analytical Society *Liberal Club*, Belarusian Students Association, League of Youth Voluntary Service, Youth Educational Centre Fialta, National Youth Council of Belarus RADA, New Group, Ecohome into the joint elaboration of the framework and the focus of the analysis for the team of analysts of the Centre for European Transformation, and into the subsequent discussion of preliminary findings of the analysis.

The analytical overview is presented for public discussion and use by civil society activists, governmental and non-governmental specialists, donors, analysts, scholars, and other stakeholders in the country and abroad in their work, as well as for defining their priorities in the development of the sector of civil society youth organizations.

Methodology of the Analysis

This analysis aims to estimate the current state and opportunities for enhancing cooperation between Belarusian civil society youth organizations, as well as between these organizations and their environment. The main subject of the survey is the perceptions of joint actions and initiatives by the leaders and participants of youth sector organizations, i.e. how they see current and future cooperation.



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Specific methods of data collection for this survey included:

Electronic questionnaire survey of randomly sampled youth organizations. The population included 327 youth organizations, organizations, which have youth as one of their target groups, and organizations periodically working with youth. One hundred and fifty questionnaires were mailed, the return ratio of fully completed questionnaires was 31 per cent.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with the sector's leaders and activists (the working experience in the sector is at least 3 years). Nineteen interviews were conducted.

One **focus group interview**, which included seven participants from among activists of youth organizations functioning in the city of Minsk or at the country level.

Recovery of **the database of youth organizations** using open information sources. Information about youth organizations was collected from various available sources¹. Out of the collected body of data - **over 800 organizations** - all sports, dance, gaming (schools, fighting federations and clubs, fitness clubs, dance clubs, etc.) organizations were intentionally excluded, as most frequently they use the legal form of an NGO but do not conduct any activity beyond organizing training sessions. Besides, all children's organizations were excluded. As a result, the final list included **327 organizations**, and these were considered the population.

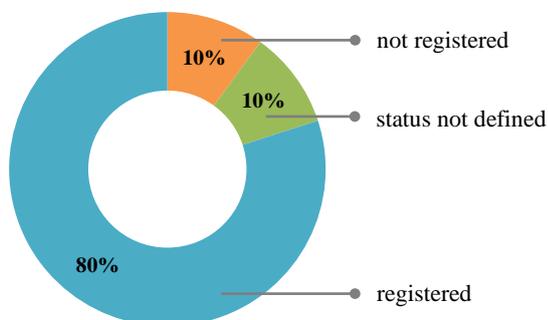
Overall sector description

The sector of youth civil society organizations of Belarus is quite diverse regarding areas of activity, types of organizations, goals, social and political attitudes and focus. At the same time, the sector's organizations and initiative groups direct their efforts at working with their target group - youth - and respectively may have common goals and objectives to solve - changing the state youth policy, promotion of youth's interests or provision of complex services to the target group - which a single organization (or a group of organizations) cannot provide without cooperating with other organizations.

¹ Coordination inspection plans // An official website of the State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus, <http://www.kgk.gov.by/ru/coordination-control-deyatel/coordination-plans>
Belarus social. 7327 organizations // website Bureau of Social Information, http://ru.belbsi.by/rights/social_belarus/organizations/ ; Database of Public Associations // Portal of Public Associations of Belarus, United Way Belarus, <http://www.ngo.by/database/ngo/tag/youth/>; Belarusian Youth Organizations // website Alternative Youth Platform (AYP), <http://ampby.org/belmolorg/>
A Catalogue of the legal entities of Belarus БЕЛСПАВКА.ORG // <http://www.belspravka.org/>
«ЮСТЫЦЫЯ БЕЛАРУСЬ», №5/2015, <http://justbel.info/ActiveContent/articlesPdfs/1242.pdf>
mentions of youth organizations on the Internet found through Google search

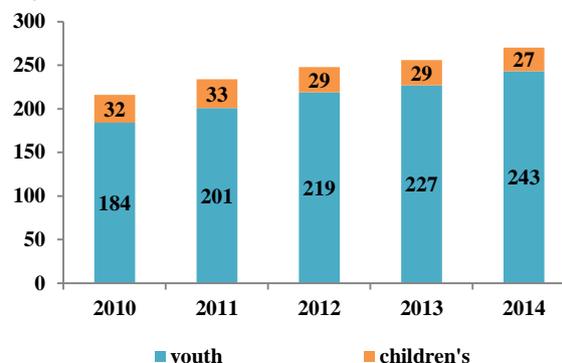
The scope of the sector of youth organizations

Diagram 1: distribution of youth public associations per registration status



Source: calculations by the survey team

Diagram 2: the number of registered youth and children's organizations



Source: Дети и Беларусь. Statistical Review, Minsk, 2015

Official data of the Ministry of Justice makes it possible to approximately define how the youth sector compares in size to other sectors of civil society organizations. Regarding the number of registered organizations, this is the third (after sports and charity) biggest sector of civil society organizations (or about **11 per cent** of all registered NGOs)².

The sector of civil society youth organizations of Belarus includes approximately **327 organizations**; about 80 per cent (or 262 organizations³) of them are officially registered youth NGOs, about 10 per cent are not registered, and the status of the remaining 10 per cent of organizations is unclear.

Geographical distribution of youth organizations

Youth organizations and organizations working with youth are mainly found in Minsk. At least **61 per cent** (or about 182 organizations) of youth organizations work in the capital city; and in each of the oblasts there are on average from 10-15 to 20-25 youth organizations (if regional branches of national and international organizations to be considered too, there might be 30-35 organizations on average). In total, about 40 per cent of all organizations are situated in central cities of oblasts and oblasts of Belarus.

² «ЮСТЫЦЫЯ БЕЛАРУСІ», №5/2015, <http://justbel.info/ActiveContent/articlesPdf/1242.pdf>

³ Here and further in the document quantitative information is cited based on the estimates of the study group. According to the official data of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus, 272 youth NGOs were registered in Belarus in 2015 (including 27 children's associations).

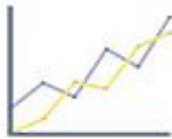
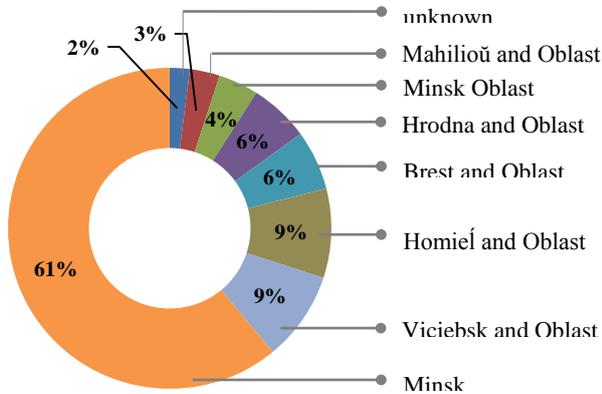
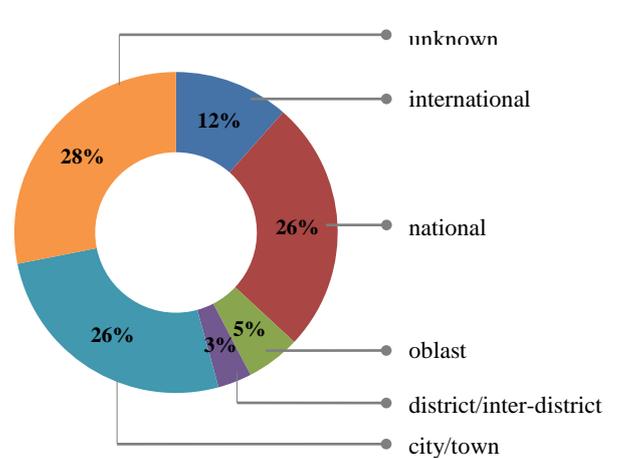


Diagram 3: distribution of youth NGOs per regions (based on registration)



Source: Дети и Беларусь. Statistical Review, Minsk, 2015

Diagram 4: distribution of youth NGOs per regional activity status

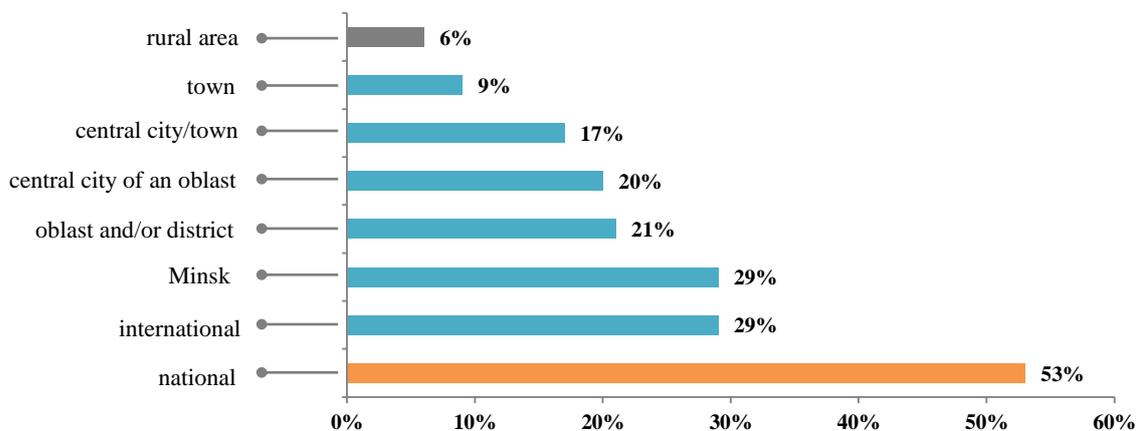


Source: estimates by the study group

The scope of the organizations' activity is determined by their status - international, national, oblast, district or city/town (see diagram 4). According to the data provided by the study group, 12 per cent of youth organizations are international, 26 per cent are national, 26 per cent have city/town status, and 8 per cent have oblast or district status.

The data of the electronic survey gives some idea of the actual regional distribution of youth organizations' activities⁴.

Diagram 5: regional distribution of the actual activity of youth organizations



Source: findings of the electronic questionnaire survey; number of respondents – 66.

⁴ Distribution of answers to the question of the e-questionnaire "Region covered by the activity of your organization/initiative, irrespective of its formal status" (please, tick all that apply) (number of answers by respondents - 66)

Focus areas of the activity of youth organizations

Regarding the topics and issues, which youth organizations address, one can distinguish four dominant thematic areas:

education, enlightenment, further training;

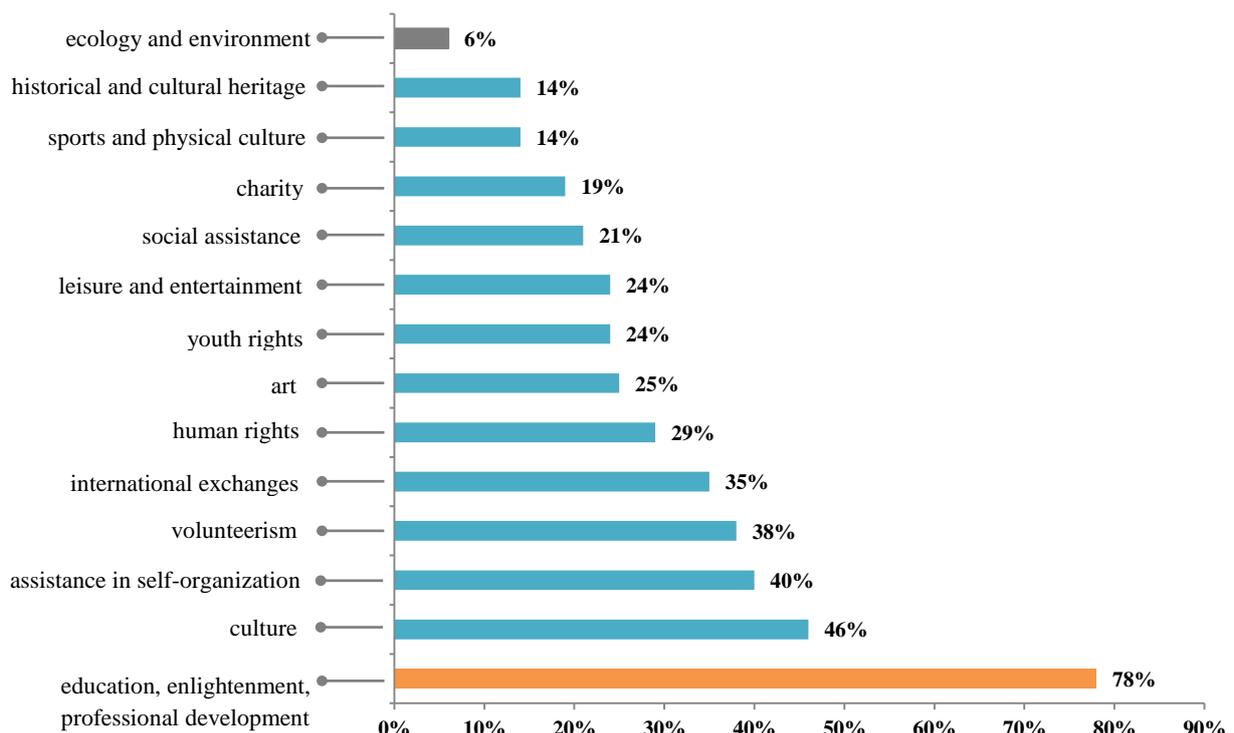
youth, development of youth movement, revealing the capacity of young people (assistance in the self-organization of youth, youth rights, youth exchanges, etc.);

social assistance, charity, volunteerism;

culture.

As for the rest, organizations focus on various topics (ecology, music, education, Christian education, historical and cultural heritage, and many others) (see diagram 6).

Diagram 6: regional thematic activity profile of youth organizations and initiatives



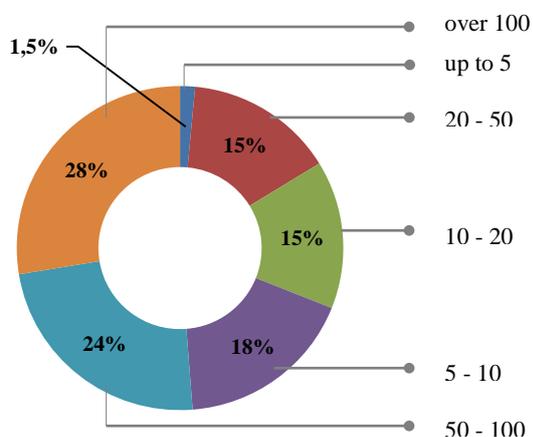
Source: findings of the electronic questionnaire survey; number of respondents – 66.



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Membership in youth organizations

Diagram 7: regional membership of youth organizations



Source: findings of the electronic questionnaire survey; number of respondents - 66

As for membership, youth organizations differ significantly in their size: from several people to several hundred members, but these are mainly organizations with many members (over 50 persons); over a half of respondent organizations belong to this group (see diagram 7).

Visibility of youth organizations

According to the electronic questionnaire survey, **80 per cent** of respondents do not believe that youth organizations and initiatives are well known in the society. At the same time, **70 per cent** of the respondents think that people "know something" about youth organizations - either heard, read of them, or participated in their activity. Thus, the respondents of the electronic survey perceive visibility of youth organizations as average. In the interviews respondents are conservative in their estimates: youth organizations are "rather poorly known", "insufficiently known", "not very well known", or "I would not say that they are well known".

Youth organizations and youth

Youth is not very deeply engaged in the activity of youth organization: just about **15 per cent** of young people are members of youth associations, and only a quarter of them are actively engaged in their work⁵. Low interest of youth in youth organizations is associated with **a)** low priority of public work; **b)** low degree of visibility of youth organizations among youth; **c)** discrepancy between what youth organizations offer and what young people are interested in.

The opportunities offered by youth organizations to youth do not match the needs of young people. For example, according to the survey, youth organizations themselves perceive the opportunities for self-realization that they offer to young

⁵ А.К. Воднева, О.А. Иванюто, Л.А. Соглаева. Социальный капитал молодежи в контексте социальных перемен: основные показатели, ресурсы, пути реализации. Из сборника: МОЛОДЕЖЬ СУВЕРЕННОЙ БЕЛАРУСИ: ШТРИХИ К ПОРТРЕТУ, МИНСК, 2012

people as merely the third most important need of youth. Educational opportunities provided throughout the country by youth organizations correlate with the problem of the quality of formal education, but this problem is only the sixth on the list of the Belarusian youth's needs. This discrepancy is also due to the fact that in the perception of young activists such category as "youth" is virtually devoid of any qualitative characteristics - they do not have a clear understanding of what makes youth youth, apart from age and activity.

Cooperation of youth organizations: current state and perspectives

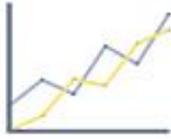
The structure of current cooperation between youth organizations and their environment may be represented as a graphic chart of network connections and relations. The network of youth organizations and their environment includes 123 focal points representing both youth organizations and various entities making contact with them (see here⁶).

In general, the overall cooperation network does not look very solid, but there are quite distinct network centres, around which a considerable number of relations are centered. The evident leaders here are Fialta, Rada, Student Rada, BOSS, Centre for the Development of Student Initiatives, Young Social Democrats, Young Gramada, New Faces, Belarusian Students Association; followed by a cluster of organizations with the medium-size number of their relations: Historika, Young Democrats, Office for the Promotion of Initiatives, Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, Youth Human Rights Group, GayBelarus.

As regards the immediate environment, contacts with environmental (through the Green Network), human rights (through Lawtrend), social and women's organizations (through Barysaŭ Social Women's Organization Province) are essential for the network of youth organizations. Independent Bologna Committee plays a significant role for the student cluster of youth organizations, Office for European Expertise and Communications and Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society act as important links within the network. If taken as a whole, international entities and organizations (European Youth Forum, International Young Democrat Union, Council of Europe, EU Delegation, and others) take a significant place in the network, although neither of them is focal for the sector.

The sector of youth organizations has a rather poor structure of cooperation. Out of more than **300 organizations** just about **15 organizations** are focal (**5 per**

⁶ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1WO1U2uVxcFUuU2WmtNUTZOSkk/view?usp=sharing>



cent), with **5-10** connections. However, the majority of organizations have few relations: up to five permanent partners. The group of focal organizations can be called the "core" of the sector - they are closely interlaced with each other. However, the networks of their partners are very branched, and remote organizations do not have their own relations with the centre. This is the indication that the sector is poorly consolidated and that it is basically rather a number of independently existing groups (regional and/or thematic). The weakness of internal relations within the sector is the evidence of the low cooperation capacity of youth organizations in addressing common objectives. However, recently there has been a positive trend of enhancing partner relations and search for topics of common interest to enable cooperation (within the last year, 70 per cent of respondents of the electronic questionnaire survey found new partners).

According to the majority of the respondents of electronic questionnaire survey (70 per cent), youth organizations implement jointly 1-5 activities (campaigns, projects) per year. However, the request to name specific examples of the cooperation of youth organizations appeared difficult for the respondents. Among the most vivid and well remembered examples of cooperation, the first five most frequently mentioned are: **1)** Fair of best practices of working with youth; **2)** Student's Week; **3)** Independent Bologna Committee; **4)** project "Human Libraries"; **5)** Festival of Non-Formal Education.

Respondents believe that to ensure successful cooperation similar organizations and organizations with similar focus should work together. With that, the main cause of failure in the implementation of joint activities, as seen by respondents, is the difference between organizations' objectives. Cooperation as such implies understanding that different organizations can in their differing activities reach common goals. For similar organizations this understanding of common goals occurs easier, while for organizations that are different more effort is needed to achieve such understanding. Correspondingly, at the current stage of the development of youth organizations sector, the capacity for cooperation is higher for organizations possessing common characteristics (such as, thematic focus area, target group) and lower for the organizations, which are more distant from each other.

Joint activities of youth organizations associated with the engagement in political processes (lobbying, advocacy, change of legislation) is not a priority for youth organizations. Only **20.8 per cent** of youth organizations are involved in such activities.

For reasons beyond their control it is hard for youth organizations to successfully influence governmental policy; besides, this can provoke risks for organizations and their members. That is why the capacity of youth organizations for the cooperation is higher in politically neutral projects and activities, while with the increase of the political component in cooperation this capacity decreases.

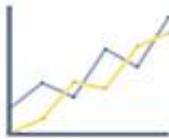
Youth organizations and their environment

Over the past year, youth organizations more frequently contacted with donors (**73 per cent**), non-youth civil society organizations (**69 per cent**), mass media (**69 per cent**), and target youth groups (**63 per cent**). Youth organizations would like to cooperate more closely with the business community, educational organizations, government bodies, international organizations, foreign youth networks (umbrellas) and foreign youth organizations, than they do now. The most significant gaps in perception of required level of cooperation and actual practice exist in cooperation of youth organizations with research institutions, political entities and foreign civil society organizations. Youth organizations cooperate very little with research institutions and think tanks. As for political entities and foreign civil society organizations, the number of respondents who mentioned that they cooperate with these entities over the past year, is twice as much as the number of those who find such cooperation necessary. Churches, state-run enterprises, political entities and national civil society platforms are of least interest for the representatives of youth organizations.

Perceptions of the objectives and the meaning of cooperation between youth organizations

The answer to the question about the objectives and meaning of cooperation between the organizations of the youth sector reflects the degree of similarity or difference of the positions of organizations, which is the evidence of a higher or lower capacity for cooperation between organizations. Most respondents think that youth organizations need to cooperate in order to implement joint projects and campaigns (**83.9 per cent**). About **60 per cent** of respondents believe that cooperation is required to influence the state policy, where the key objective is cooperation in the interests of youth and youth organizations. Improved conditions for the activity of the civil society as a whole and political change in Belarus are the least important objectives of cooperation.

Representatives of youth organizations of various types do not doubt that cooperation is necessary and beneficial. Firstly, it gives the possibility for the



exchange of experience, knowledge, access to partner audience, promotion of non-governmental organizations. This level of goals of cooperation can be called socio-communicative. According to the respondents, the second level of meaningful cooperation is strategy. It implies elaboration of common strategies for youth organizations, protection of the interests of youth before the society and the state, and contribution into youth policy making.

Thus, representatives of different youth organizations, whether they have stronger or weaker relations with the state, admit the importance of advocacy and lobbying; but in practice they are hardly ready to engage in such activities as lobbying, advocacy, etc.

Conclusions

- **The sector of youth NGOs is not the largest by the number of organizations** (about 11 per cent of the total number of organizations / 300-350 organizations), **but pretty large by the number of participants** (not less than 300,000 persons).
- **Young people are not deeply involved in the activity of youth organizations:** about 15 per cent of young people are members of youth associations, and only a quarter of them are actively involved in their activity. Youth organizations are virtually invisible for the Belarusian youth. The opportunities offered by youth organizations to youth do not match the needs of young people.
- **Youth non-governmental organizations are not very active at the regional level.** Most youth organizations are concentrated in the capital city (61 per cent) and central cities of oblasts (about 20 per cent of organisations), while only 1-4 per cent of organizations are registered in the regions (oblast cities/towns and oblasts).
- **There are no distinct organizations-leaders or individual leaders in the sector of youth organizations.** However, in the course of the survey, focal organizations and individuals were identified; and eventually it will depend on them, how intensively organizations will get consolidated within the sector.
- **The level of cooperation between youth organizations and the Belarusian state is far from optimal.** Youth organizations would like to cooperate more closely with government bodies and state institutions (first and foremost, with educational institutions). However, the state labels youth organizations as either loyal or disloyal; but even organizations loyal to the state

experience difficulties in this cooperation.

- **Influencing the state policy in order to improve the state of youth organizations is not a top priority day-to-day activity of youth organizations.**

In contrast to understanding in theory the need to influence policies, in practice such activities and cooperation of youth organizations are very rare.

- **Youth organizations are focused on solving their own very specific problems and objectives, while addressing the objectives common for the sector is a secondary priority.** However, there are factors, which improve the capacity of youth organizations for cooperation in addressing common objectives. Among these factors are common mission, shared understanding of the goals of cooperation, and good personal relationships between the leaders and the activists of the sectors.

Recommendations

- To be more attractive for youth, youth organizations should better study their "consumers" and identify the basis for their offers to the target group.

- Belarusian youth organizations should work more actively in the regions, especially in small towns and in rural areas. Due to the lack of entertainment options outside of the capital young people in the regions have a lot of free time and a big potential for work, as basically they do not know what to do with their free time.

- Belarusian youth organizations should pay attention to the fact that today no one of the influential people in youth organizations is able to individually foster consolidation - their influence is too limited. However, joint activities of these people could be effective and encouraging for bringing people and organizations together.

- Today youth organizations cannot influence youth and other policies. However, such activities are possible and essential, but only in larger coalitions and in a large-scale cooperation with other clusters of civil society organizations of Belarus.

- As external, socio-political conditions are an important factor to be considered by youth organizations while planning and cooperating, the organizations, through public communications, should put the improvement of these conditions on the agenda of their cooperation.

- So far, shared vision of the organizations' mission and cooperation goals is just an opportunity. To make it real, youth organizations need to build cooperation through regular joint events that are mostly not politicised - festivals, common forums, and thematic campaigns. And move further, because cooperation of youth organizations should focus on their mission and common values of promoting the interests and protecting the rights of the young people.