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SUMARIO

Youth Policies Priorities: Understanding young people pathways in Border Regions of Portugal

Prioridades de las políticas de juventud: Comprender los caminos de los jóvenes en las regiones fronterizas de Portugal

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to explore how youth policies at European, national and regional level are addressing priorities towards a positive youth development in the border regions of Portugal. Empirically, we did interviews in these regions with local policy makers and document analysis of European and Portuguese youth policies. The results shows a strong understanding at regional level of the crucial role that policies and actions play in engaging young people in positive pathways, although there is little reference to regional sensitivity in policy priorities at European and National levels. We argue for the need to design territorialized policies that are able to report on young people's situated experiences and to reduce the gap of opportunities between territories.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene por objeto explorar la forma en que las políticas de juventud a nivel europeo, nacional y regional abordan las prioridades para un desarrollo positivo de la juventud en las regiones fronterizas de Portugal. Empíricamente, hemos realizado entrevistas en estas regiones con los responsables políticos locales y análisis de documentos de las políticas de juventud europeas y portuguesas. Los resultados muestran una fuerte comprensión a nivel regional del papel crucial que desempeñan las políticas y acciones para que los jóvenes participen en vías positivas, aunque hay poca referencia a la sensibilidad regional en las prioridades políticas a nivel europeo y nacional. Abogamos por la necesidad de diseñar políticas territorializadas que sean capaces de informar sobre las experiencias situadas de los jóvenes y de reducir la brecha de oportunidades entre los territorios.

1. GROWING UP IN THE BORDER REGIONS OF PORTUGAL

Territories are not equally organized and developed, leading to differentiated access to opportunities and benefits. Peripheral regions, such as border regions, may have restrictions in access to education rights (Bagley & Hillyard, 2015), conducting to poorer school performance and outcomes when compared to urban centers. Those regions are often rural or semi-rural areas, with low population density and mostly with agriculture and third sector economic activities. It is also recognized that some of these regions may limit the opportunities of their population, as people living in rural areas are generally more likely to drop out from education or training (Eurostat, 2015[1]). There is, therefore, a growing need for specific measures and policies to improve the opportunities for young people growing up in border regions, to fully participate in tackling social or educational inequalities at global and local level.

Continental Portugal has 278 municipalities, of which 38 are located in the border regions next to Spain. The Portuguese border regions are economically and socially disadvantage and have fewer education and employment opportunities (EU/ERDF, 2016[2]). With higher percentages of illiteracy (PORDATA, 2011[3]) and early school leaving (EU/ERDF, 2016), border regions struggle with lower

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1   EUROSTAT (2015): *Eurostat regional yearbook*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7018888/KS-HA-15-001-EN-N.pdf.
2   European Union/European Regional Development Fund (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589825/EPRS_BRI(2016)589825_EN.pdf
3   PORDATA (2011): *Base de Dados de Portugal Contemporâneo* [Database of Contemporary Portugal]. Illiteracy Rates. Retrieved from https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Taxa+de+analfabetismo+segundo+os+Censos

annual household income and a higher percentage of unemployment when compared to urban areas where most industries operate, employers can find more qualified human resources and where the population with higher levels of consumption is concentrated (INE, 2016). In fact, as shown in figure 1 (AD&C, 2018), between 2001 and 2016 the number of long-term unemployed grew clearly with differences between the coastal areas and the inlands, and with more evidence in the inland and border regions.In general, border regions in Portugal face other additional adversities, such as an aging population; population density, which is far below the national average (Carmo, 2011; Stoer & Araújo, 2012). Some of the municipalities in the inland and border regions do not offer access to compulsory education (12 years or up to 18 years). For example, secondary education is not provided, which means that students and, sometimes, their families need to move to other municipalities. Moreover, the diversity of higher education provision is less in border regions, as more than 60% of higher education institutions (HEI) are located in the coastal regions, as shown in figure 2 (AD&C, 2018).

As a result, not only do some young people have to leave their home regions to complete compulsory education, but most of them also have to leave their region if they want to continue their studies in higher education (Author, 2016). Also, not only formal education, but also social and educational pathways in general (cultural, social, and participation opportunities) are experienced within a combination of constrains, some of with are linked to socioeconomic status and others to geographical location and, consequently, to the unequal distribution of opportunities.

Several challenges are currently taking place in the lives of young people, such as non-linear transitions (Author, 2013; Pais, 2003; Serracant, 2015) to adulthood and changes in the labor market with rates of youth unemployment increasing. Over the last couple of decades, many authors have argued that youth transitions have become more complex, heterogeneous, and fragmented (Furlong et al., 2003; Ryan, 2001). Youth trajectories are far from being completely individualized, since factors such as gender and class of origin continue to play an important role in structuring school-to-work transitions (Brzinsky-Fay, 2015; Fenton & Dermott, 2006) along with contextual and institutional features (Iannelli & Smyth, 2008; Quintini & Martin, 2014).

Considering that youth development constitutes more than biological maturation but, instead, it's a young person's growing capacity to understand and engage in his/her environment over time (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman,

2004), spatial and geographical dimensions have a strong influence on the construction of their aspirations, especially with regard to educational decisions and mobility (Author, 2014). In fact, a positive youth development (PYD) framework implies that policymakers works with youth to improve their assets, agency, contribution and enabling environment[4] or, in other words, view them as capable of influencing their own positive development (Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Iwasaki, 2016; Roth et al., 1998). If a youth policy is defined as "a strategy implemented by public authorities to provide young people with opportunities and experiences that support their successful integration into society and enable them to be active and responsible members of their societies - as well as agents of change" (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 3) - we may questioning about the priorities for youth in its diversity, specifically for those living in border regions.

Assuming that a certain degree of harmonization and European integration is necessary, in particular when addressing global issues and setting priorities for youth development at European level, it is expected that these may be translated into different strategies at national and regional level (Cifuentes & Valero, 2016). Youth policies have different levels of definition, influence and execution. When EU Member States develop policies at national level that are aligned or regulated by European directives and policies, it is expected that there will be some degree of national interpretation for the implementation of these policies (Ball, 1998; Lingard & Rizvi, 2000; Popkewitz, 1996; Vigil, 2015). This aspect is crucial to understand how national and local contexts revise and rethink their policy development to include demands related to young people.

Our main focus in this place is discuss how the EU and national and regional youth development policies take into account the diversity of youth and if and how it promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities and fostering positive pathways.

2. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This paper is grounded on a large-scale study on resilience, engagement, and sense of belonging of young people growing up in border regions

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4   See https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework.

of Portugal, [name of the project]⁵. Specifically, this paper will focus on the analysis of youth policy documents developed at EU and national level, focusing on how policies integrate regionally sensitive issues into young people's priorities and, additionally, in semi structured interviews with local policy makers.

Document analysis enables us to produce or revise knowledge and create new ways of understanding the phenomena (Sá-Silva, Almeida & Guindani, 2009; Bowen, 2009). The first source of data comes from the policy analysis of documents on youth policy at EU and national level. We carried out an analysis of public records (O'Leary, 2014) such as guidelines, policies, reports and laws. The selection of 46 documents, assessed and validated by the Portuguese Sport and Youth National Institute, was the result of an online search on the European Commission and Portuguese Government websites and on the official websites of youth-related political bodies and institutions. Our inclusion criteria were documents that directly focused on youth/young people in general, as well as documents that dealt with youth and regional specificities. Consequently, documents that refer to youth/young people issues but where these were not their main focus were excluded (for example, "DigComp 2.0: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, 2016"). As we are interested in understanding how EU and national documents specifically focusing on youth/young people consider and integrate regional issues, 26 documents were excluded and the following table shows the 20 finally selected documents in chronological order that convey this focus.

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5   [name of the project] is funded by Norte Portugal Regional Operational Programme (NORTE 2020), under the PORTUGAL 2020 Partnership Agreement, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and by national funds through the Foundation for Science and Technology, IP (FCT). This project aims to investigate, in Portuguese border regions, individual, contextual/institutional and systemic factors in young people biographies, and to analyse how communities are proactively counteracting inequalities, fostering young people engagement in positive pathways. Methodologically the project combines (1) policy analysis and local experts interviews to understand levels of integration of formal policies into local programmes; (2) a survey to young people from the 38 border municipalities in order to understand the key role of sense of belonging, resilience and engagement in young people biographies; (3) and case studies – that include biographical interviews focus groups with young people to develop and in depth understanding of processes influencing young people pathways, and to analyse how communities are proactively addressing challenges affecting young people in border regions, either encouraging young people positive pathways or equipping them to amplify opportunities. A mobile app, an auditing programme and youth agendas are participatory-based activities, empirically supported, aiming to promote capacity building of young people and communities. [insert project link]

TABLE 1
CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL DOCUMENTS

European		National
European Commission White Paper https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/default/files/themes/strategies/doc/2001_white_paper/lb_com_2001_0370_en.pdf	2001	
Revised European Charter on youth participation in local and regional life https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/revised-european-charter-on-the-participation-of-young-people-in-local-and-regional-life	2003	
i2010 - A European Information Society for growth and employment https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_05_184	2005	
	2006	Youth Associations Regime https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/359360/details/maximized_
EU Youth Strategy - Investing and Empowering https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Aef0022	2009	
EU Youth Report https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/eu-youth-report-2012_en.pdf Report on the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/strategy-2010-2018_en	2012	
Youth Guarantee https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF	2013	Youth White Paper https://dre.pt/pesquisa/-/search/259266/details/maximized

TABLE 1
CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL DOCUMENTS (CONCLUSION)

European		National
EU Youth Work Plan https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A42014Y0614%2802%29	2014	
Renewed framework for European coopera- tion in the youth field https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015XG1215%2801%29	2015	
A new skills agenda for Europe https://espas.secure.europarl.europa.eu/ orbis/document/new-skills-agenda-europe	2016	Creation of the Mission Unit for the inland enhance- ment https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/73268683/details/maxi- mized
	2017	National Programme for Territorial Cohesion https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/governo/pro- grama/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-/ ficheiros-coesao-territorial/programa-nacional-para- a-coesao-territorial-pdf.aspx~ An Agenda for the Inlands https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/governo/pro- grama/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-/ ficheiros-coesao-territorial/programa-nacional-para- a-coesao-territorial-pdf.aspx~
EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL	2018	National Youth Plan https://pnj.ipdj.gov.pt/ Youth Participatory Budget https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/115375933/details/maxi- mized 70now! http://70ja.gov.pt/sobre-o-artigo-70-o/

Source: Table by the authors

In addition to document analysis, the second source of data consists of 38 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with policy makers[6] responsible

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6   To ensure the compliance with ethical requirements, an informed consent was signed by both parts – participants and researchers - containing information on the research and ensuring the participants

for youth and education policy from the border regions municipalities (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). The aims of these interviews was to have an in depth understanding about perspectives and actions regarding youth development and priorities. The script was organized into the following dimensions: professional background and experience of the respondent; knowledge of the school cluster and city/region; policies, practices and youth cultures; and educational pathways of young people in relation to border/rural regions. Table 2 shows the regional policy makers' (RPM) characterization by sex, level of education and their position in the city council.

TABLE 2
INTERVIEWEES' CHARACTERIZATION

Interviewees	Sex	Level of Education	Position in the City Council
RPM1	Male	Higher Education	Education Office Coordinator
RPM2	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM3	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM4	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM5	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM6	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM8	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM9	Male	Higher Education	President
RPM10	Male	Higher Education	Parish Council President
RPM11	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM12	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM13	Male	Higher Education	Vice-President
RPM14	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM15	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM16	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM17	Female	Higher Education	Education Councillor
RPM18	Male	Higher Education	Vice-President
RPM19	Female	Higher Education	Head of Office

on the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. All participants were invited to participate, according to their own availability and willingness to be part of the research. The right to withdraw from the research in any stage was clearly expressed. When reporting/disseminating research results, participants' anonymity is ensured by the use of fictional names and by the omission of information that might lead to their identification.

TABLE 2
INTERVIEWEES' CHARACTERIZATION (CONCLUSIÓN)

Interviewees	Sex	Level of Education	Position in the City Council
RPM20	Female	Higher Education	Head of Office
RPM21	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM22	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM23	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM24	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM25	Female	Higher Education	Head of Office
RPM26	Male	Secondary Education	Youth Councillor
RPM28	Female	Higher Education	Head of Office
RPM29	Male	Higher Education	Vice-President
RPM30	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM31	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM32	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM33	Female	Higher Education	Head of Office
RPM34	Female	Higher Education	Education Councillor
RPM35	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM36	Female	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM37	Male	Higher Education	Youth Councillor
RPM38	Male	Higher Education	Head of Office

Source: Table by the authors

The coding process followed a thematic analysis resulting in different categories covering policy documents and interviews. For this paper, we will focus on the category that refers to aspects of regional sensitivity in youth policies and on how regional issues are incorporated into EU and national policies with focus on youth/young people. All documents were analyzed, codified and categorized by the process of content analysis (Bardin, 2011; Krippendorff, 2004) supported by NVivo12. In the coding, the rule of mutual exclusivity of categories was not followed in some cases (L'Écuyer, 1990).

As a result of the codification of policy documents and interviews for the category "Priorities for the future of young people", several references were identified at EU level (n= 831), national level (n= 441) and regional level (n= 450). The references are organized into the following sub-categories related to youth related priorities and table 3 shows the frequency of underline interview references:

- Education: includes references focusing on promoting access to education for all young people, including the importance of formal education and non-formal learning (n = 336) ;
- Employment: covers aspects focused on promoting youth employment, including the promotion of employment opportunities and specific training (n = 296);
- Digital: includes references focusing on promoting the use of the Internet and reducing the lack of digital skills among young people (n = 214);
- Inclusion: focus on promoting equal opportunities for all young people to participate in education and the labor market, as well as gender issues (n = 208);
- Mobility opportunities: references focusing on the promotion of cross-border mobility of young people (n = 110);
- Health and wellbeing: focus on promoting the health and wellbeing of young people (e.g. mental and sexual health, physical activity, healthy lifestyle) (n = 85);
- Higher education: focusing on measures to promote sound investment in higher education in order to better prepare and train young people (n = 82);
- Citizenship: all aspects focusing on promoting young people's participation and implementing measures of civic engagement (n = 74);
- Culture: focusing on the promotion of cultural diversity and young people's access to cultural experiences/activities, as well as on the promotion of cultural heritage (n = 71);
- Transport: in relation to transport systems for young people and the need to improve people's means of transport (n = 53);
- Entrepreneurship: includes aspects focused on promoting the reduction of youth unemployment and stimulating innovation among young people (n = 39);
- Sport: includes references focusing on promoting the health and physical activity of young people (n = 39);
- Access to housing: includes references that focus on improving young people's access to housing and housing rights (n = 37);
- Environment and sustainable development: include references that focus on the promotion of youth actions on environmental issues and climate change (n = 29);

- Gender: references that focus on the gender issues and gender equality (n = 28);
- Free time occupation: focus on promoting leisure among young people as non-formal education (n = 21);

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY TABLE OF INTERVIEW REFERENCES

References to:	European Level	National Level	Regional Level
Education	169	118	49
Employment	177	53	66
Digital	137	58	19
Inclusion	126	62	20
Mobility Opportunity	73	17	20
Health and Wellbeing	36	22	27
Higher Education	5	15	62
Citizenship	44	17	13
Culture	25	16	30
Transports	2	7	44
Entrepreneurship	10	16	13
Sport	4	9	26
Access to Housing	3	19	15
Environment and Sustainable Development	6	6	17
Gender Issues	13	4	11
Free time occupation	1	2	18
Total	831	441	450

Source: Table by the authors

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Youth in policymaking: alignments and differences in addressing youth priorities at European, national and regional levels

EU youth policy is a key dimension addressed in the Europe 2020 document, the EU Lisbon Strategy's successor document. It also incorporates youth issues into its policy guidelines, such as the Youth on the Move initiative to improve the performance of education systems and enhance the international attractiveness of European higher education. EU youth policy requires the EU to be able to bring about changes in Member States' policies, so that EU priorities are expected to match national priorities. From the analysis of the documents, 16 different youth policy priorities have been identified at regional, national and European level. Of these, issues related to employment, education and inclusion opportunities are the most frequently addressed, as shown in figure 3.

The results of the frequency show an agreement between the main priorities at EU, national and regional level. This means that all political levels highlight the same priorities more clearly and have higher scores: inclusion, employment and education. This indicates a convergence at policy level, recognizing that these may be common priorities in relation to young people from different EU Member States. However, a more detailed analysis shows that Portugal has a significant difference in the strong prioritization of education. The more differences between the three policy levels concern the priority given to digital, which is far less present in regional affairs than at national and European level. On the other hand, the priorities regarding mobility and transport are much more pronounced at regional level than at national and European level. If we look at the priorities that are in the lower ranks at national and regional level, but have higher values compared to those at EU and national level, these are the concerns about access to housing, which can be explained by recent house price inflation and which affect young people in particular, leading to a decline in home ownership and the fixation of young people in the region.

Our question, and the one we are trying to discuss here, is how the EU and national and regional youth development policies take into account the diversity and heterogeneity of youth (Author, 2013; Fonseca, 2009; Pais, 2003). The problems underlying the above priorities do not affect European

TABLE WITH AUTHORS' AMENDMENTS ADDRESSING EVALUATORS' COMMENTS

EVALUADOR 1	Authors' amendments
- to solve a few typos and grammar mistakes in English	The full text has been revised and typos and grammar mistakes were corrected.
- to order the categories in Figure 3 and listed on page 4 by decreasing order (from the more to the less frequent)	The categories are now listed by a decreasing order (from the more to the less frequent) and a frequency table of interview references was added (table 3).
- to include Figure 3 and text in the results section	The Figure 3 (which is now the Figure 1) and respective text were already in the results section. If the evaluator 1 was referring to another table, please let us know to correctly address the request.
- to exclude Figures 1 and 2 (mas) because they do not seem particularly relevant for the main argument of the article (which has to do with youth policies), especially because employment and higher education are just two of the categories under analysis and no connection is made between data from interviews and policy documents with particular regions/municipalities highlighted in the maps	Thank you for this remark. Figures 1 and 2 were removed from the manuscript.
- to clarify in each citation from the interviews that it comes from the interviews (because there are other citations that are extracted from policy documents): e.g. Interview RPM 5	All the interviews' quotes are now identified as such.
- instead of identifying in the citations all interviewees as RPM, the authors could distinguish between the 6 types of interviewee (Youth Councilor, President, Head of Office...) without forcing the reader to check Table 2.	All the interviews' quotes are now identified as such.
EVALUADOR 2	Authors' amendments
En la página 3, en el apartado "Methodological…", se alude a un estudio más amplio del que forma parte. En principio, una parte de un proyecto puede dar lugar a un artículo, siempre que el estudio original no esté publicado o al menos que el artículo no aparezca literalmente en dicha publicación. Quizás, se le podría preguntar al autor si efectivamente el escrito no está publicado. En todo caso, vendría bien una pequeña descripción de los objetivos, etc. del proyecto amplio.	This is an original article, not published anywhere else, in which the data was collected as part of a large-scale funded project. A description of the project aims has been added in footnote on page 3 for a better clarification. The project is still in progress and there is no yet main/final publication – as a book or a report. Usually, in those final documents the reference is to former publication as articles, as this one.

La investigación comprende 46 documentos de la política de la UE, del gobierno portugués y de las regiones; además se han realizado 38 entrevistas a diversos responsables de los consejos de las ciudades (quizás ayuntamientos). Se ha realizado un análisis de los documentos pero no se indican de forma detallada las fuentes consultadas y los criterios de exclusión e inclusión.	The links where the sources were collected have been added to table 1. We included additional and detailed information about the methodological procedures regarding the main and final selection of policy documents.
Después se deberían exponer también los resultados de forma más sistemática junto con una discusión de los mismos. La comparación de resultados ha sido escasa.	All the results and discussion section were rewritten and a further integration was done in order to address this issue.
Las entrevistas se deberían presentar en una tabla de frecuencias e incluir el modelo de entrevistas.	A frequency table of interview references was added, and the categories are now listed by a decreasing order. In addition to what was already been described, it was specified that the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the 38 contexts of the research.
Noto la ausencia de entrevistas u otra captación de opiniones de jóvenes o de instituciones que puedan proporcionar dichas opiniones. Es difícil completar el trabajo con esta obtención de datos lo cual quita valor a la investigación. Al menos deberían indicar expresamente que esto constituye una limitación del estudio que podría ser una línea futura de investigación.	The integration of young people perspectives will be done in another publication. As referred the project is still in progress and we are still in the process of content analysis of the young people interviewees. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the article our aim was to confront different levels of governance regarding young people priorities. This remark of evaluator 2 is very relevant and we will deeply consider it in another publication.
Las referencias me parecen excesivas (citan dos veces a la RER). Por otra parte no se hace referencia a los métodos que han seguido para la revisión.	14 existing references were excluded. 2 more references were added regarding the process of document analysis, namely: (1) O'LEARY, Z. (2014). The essential guide to doing your research project (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc; and (2) BOWEN, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27-40. doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027

youth as a whole in the same way, as young people belong to certain so-cial classes, ethnic groups or geographical locations which affect the way experiences are lived. In this case, we are only interested in discussing the intersection of a generation in a broader sense - young people - and the variable region to which they belong - border regions.

3.2. Education and employment

When unpacking the priority given to education, we can see some par-ticularities when comparing the three policy levels. At European and national level, priority in education refers to the urgency of solving problems related to early school leaving by supporting the development of youth work and other non-formal learning opportunities (Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field, 2010-2018). The same is happening at natio-nal level, where the focus is on reducing early school leaving and the need to set up technical-pedagogical teams with mediation skills to help reduce drop out level (Youth White Paper, 2013). At the regional level, on the other hand, education is seen as an investment for the settlement of the popu-lation. From the point of view of the respondents, investing in schools and providing young people with a complete and positive educational pathway is the strategy that is understood to improve the region.

«And over the years we put a lot of emphasis on education, because we are giving to new families the opportunity to settle down, a good education, and free public education in our county. The City Council, alongside what the State, has already taken on as its responsibility, offered the school textbooks, now it has spread [at national level]» (interview RPM 8, Youth Councillor)

«I believe that those who have the opportunity and the possibility to stay here will be left out. Will they be as many as we would like them to be? They are not. That our daily routine here is to create these opportunities and to create the necessary synergies to keep these people here? Yes, we want our young people to stay, we do not want them to immigrate, we do not want them to leave» (interview RPM 24, Youth Councillor)

Different priorities are interconnected. For example, issues related to different types of education have a significant focus, as it is a tool for the

employment of young people and thus for their integration as full and autonomous citizens. This is also directly linked to the focus on cross-border exchanges to broaden young people's perspectives.

> «Access to education should be guaranteed for all young people; a personalized approach to learning, focusing on young people, should include a flexible guidance and counseling service as well as appropriate information systems that respect lifestyle diversity; education systems should make it possible to combine different activities and different functions» (European Commission White Paper, 2001)

> «Preventing poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged young people and breaking the chain of its intergenerational transmission by mobilizing all actors involved in young people›s lives (parents, teachers, social workers, health professionals, youth workers, young people themselves, police and judicial bodies, employers, etc..)» (EU Youth Strategy - Investing and Empowering, 2009)

These priorities give rise to concern about the needs of young people to achieve these objectives. They are based on problems previously identified by the EU and Member States, making it impossible to analyze them without taking them into account. In fact, in 2013, the Youth Guarantee Recommendation was formally adopted, through the European Social Fund, which includes several actions that, as far as youth is concerned, will form the basis for the effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee. The focus on education and employment issues will be reinforced by the creation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), which is one of the measures to support the Youth Guarantee. There would therefore appear to be an EU narrative on education and employment as far as young people and youth are concerned, but it does not reveal any regionally sensitive aspects when considering these priorities. Contrarily, there is a focus on the work to be done to address the current global challenges related to youth unemployment and the need for stakeholder collaboration towards future policy investment (Bessant & Watts, 2014; Dhakal, Connell, & Burgess, 2018).

At regional level, the same priorities require a contextual framework. Municipalities are concerned to provide guidance and opportunities for young people to organize their education, particularly towards higher education, while encouraging their return to the region.

«We must respect them. We have to do more than understand it, we must respect it because some young people will go on to higher education. That is great. It has been every mayor's dream to give young people, his young citizens, the opportunity to get their education, to have that chance, and we have helped them with scholarships. We have a program where we help to pay the tuition fees» (interview RPM 3, Youth Councillor).

Nevertheless, this is a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, if higher education attendance is a priority, on the other hand, the aid and investment to give young people this opportunity can have a negative impact on the depopulation of the region.

«It›s not something spectacular, but it›s something that also helps [the municipality's monetary aid]. Which I didn't have during my old days, but it's still true that things have changed. And so, at the moment, we already have many young people from [the name of the municipality] attending higher education but with the worst phenomenon: they stay in those centers» (interview RPM 11, Youth Councillor)

«The problem is that young people continue to leave because there's no work. (...) Today all our young people, most of them, perhaps 90% or more, go to university. From the moment they enter higher education, they attend their courses, and then they have great difficulties because they don't have the opportunity to find work in their municipality or region in the field of study in which they graduated in. That is the biggest difficulty» (interview RPM 28, Head of Office)

When analysing employment, the three policy levels behave differently, with this priority at EU level being higher compared to the results at regional and national level. Nevertheless, it is an evident priority at the three levels and there is no doubt that employment is a concern of youth policies, in particular to support young people when they wish or need to stay in the regions. For example, in 2017' An Agenda for the Inlands, young people received greater visibility in the form of policy documents because of the role that they can play in the fight against the depopulation of border regions. This policy focuses on encouraging young people to stay/live in border regions and involving them in the fight against depopulation.

«Given the challenges we face as a country due to population decline, depopulation and aging, public policies for youth are becoming increasingly important in the strategic planning of the various long-term sectoral policies. Preparing the country›s future now requires the pursuit of a robust youth policy. Its anchoring will depend on the quality of the policy and the likely capacity of decision-makers and institutions» (National Youth Plan, 2018).

What is more visible in the discourses of the interviewees than in the policy documents is the will to promote young people's sense of belonging to their region. This seems to be the core of the policy of population fixation, where is recognized that young people could benefit local development (Neumeier, 2017).

3.3. Participation

Young people's practices - and community-based networking initiatives - can engage them in collaborative and learning actions recognizing communities' collective knowledge as a matter of social and cognitive justice (Author, 2016; Skerratt, 2013), because it opens the possibility to recognize other forms of knowledge, especially where there are structural inequalities. In order to achieve this, the development of outreach strategies and a policy that supports but also monitors the youth pathways can be a solution. The main goal is to understand their reality and their new contexts of participation, to increase their participation and consequently to increase the chances of their return. One of the interviewees, in charge of the youth policies in the municipality, explains young people perspective about their relationship to the region:

«(...) "*I'm going to my homeland because I know I can make my contribution in this, in this, and that...*". And they [the young people] are a great contributor, we have many young people volunteering, especially from the 12th grade; we have many young people volunteering at various levels» (interview RPM 23, Youth Councillor)

Another aspect that local political figures highlight as relevant to promote the connection of youth people with their regions is providing them with opportunities to participate in the community life. The following section of the interview demonstrate the awareness of this gap between young people and civic and political involvement:

«Yes, it was a long time ago, we were not yet in the municipality. I already felt that the young people wanted to interact, but there were no open doors on the other side, or if it were, was merely institutional and people do not want to know about that. There is a large breakup, a complete divorce, between young people and politics. And what happens? The few young people that exist politically, politically in general, non-partisan ... look at this and say, «*I'm going there, either JSD or JS[7], and there's no room for it*"» (interview RPM 29, Vice-President)

At a national level young people are portrayed as having an active role in national and local development. As seen below, the Portuguese Youth White Paper was implemented in 2013, in the same year as the Youth Guarantee. As expected, there is a transposition of EU guidelines, despite the recent creation of a National Youth Plan in 2018.

«Therefore, both in our constitutional text and in the European and international levels, there is the notion that young people should participate in social and political life - in particular in designing and implementing policies that directly and indirectly affect youth - and a clear understanding of the objectives and priority areas for such participation. It was in this context that the Government promoted the elaboration of the ‹Youth White Paper›, as a compilation of contributions to the definition of a joint strategy for the youth area in Portugal» (Youth White Paper, 2013)

«Priority: Ensure the realization of the right to education from a holistic and inclusive perspective, including bringing non-formal and informal learning areas closer to the formal education system, focusing on the development and recognition of competences, with an emphasis on the integration of young people into working life and the exercise of citizenship and civic participation, taking into account their specific conditions» (National Youth Plan, 2018)

To create effective conditions for participation and new and inclusive spaces for participation seem to be a fundamental aspect of youth policies. In fact, if there is any certainty about youth in Europe, it is that they are seen as a fundamental "tool" and resource – or, in other words, as assets capable

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7   Social Democratic Youth (JSD) and Socialist Youth (JS), members of the two largest Portuguese political parties.

of influencing their own positive development (Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Roth et al., 1998) – for promoting a more solid and democratic social space and growth. This aspect is emphasized in Youth Strategy 2009 and 2019 when policies addressing the problems and needs of young people are discussed and designed, even if the period between these documents is ten years:

«European youth must be provided with the tools to seize opportunities for participation in the civic and political fields, volunteering, creativity, entrepreneurship, sport and involvement in global causes. Problems with education, employment, inclusion and health, together with financial, housing or transport problems, make it difficult for young people to gain access to autonomy and a situation that gives them the opportunity and resources to manage their lives, participate fully in society and take independent decisions» (EU Youth Strategy, 2009)

«Recognizing that all young people are a resource for society, all youth policies and activities should uphold their right to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies that affect them through meaningful youth participation and youth organizations. In this context, policies should be based on recognizing the changes brought about by digital communication that affect democratic and civic participation» (EU Youth Strategy, 2019)

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the rational underlying young people's decision-making and to create places for listening to their voices at local level. The following response from interviews shows that they have the perception that young people would be keen to stay if better conditions were offered. Nevertheless, from their words we may assume that some municipalities are making efforts in investing in possibilities that are attractive to young people to return and at the same time they are integrating in their daily practice initiatives to promote young people development.

«We›re working on it, but that›s what I say: they will work it out, but they will come back, even if it›s on the weekends, and that›s good for us, it›s the recognition of the territory. They›re very rooted in the homeland, and that›s good, I saw it myself when I was a student, "*Are you going home? Yes, I am",* and I was also linked to an association at the time. And I see exactly the same in my daughter and she's in a band too and there's this connection» (interview RPM 23, Youth Councillor)

«Now, to answer your question specifically: *do young people stay?*, I believe some of them have the opportunity and the possibility to stay here. Are they as many as we would like to? They are not. Our daily job here is to make…, is to create these opportunities and create the necessary synergies to keep these people here? Yes. We want our young people to stay, we don't want them to immigrate, to leave» (interview RPM 31, Youth Councillor).

The existence of jobs and access to culture is directly linked to a greater possibility of settling young people in the region. These respondents defend the development of networking methods (Barrencua & Satrustegui, 2011) to anticipate forms of support that go beyond those of the central state by responding to concrete needs at regional level. The local level's capacity to promote participation in policy-making is, therefore, focused on promoting capacity building for participatory approaches (Bertozzi, 2015), not only for young people but for the community as a whole.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how European and national policies address young people positive pathways, with particular attention to the integration of regionally sensitive issues arising from the specific needs of Portuguese border regions.

The analysis of European and national youth policy documents showed that little reference is made to regional sensitivity when addressing youth policy priorities. At European level, youth strategies aim to create equal opportunities for young people in education and on the labor market, and to encourage them to participate actively in society. There are efforts to strengthen the specific protection of young people's rights and to support evidence-based European cooperation in the field of youth development. At national level, different stages of policy implementation contribute to the development of documents that define a comprehensive strategy in the youth field. There seems to be a lack of a regional sensitive contextualization of these policies, which urges a prioritization of the geographical dimension, which is not only a question of geography as a strong influence on young people's experiences, but also on the design of opportunities and pathways.

Border regions are concerned with youth positive development, since there is an understanding at regional level of the crucial role that local-level policies and actions play in promoting youth development and involving young people in significant pathways. In other words, there is a need for community-based initiatives to foster shared responsibility, hope and a sense of significance (Thomas, 2019) supported by a network approach (Hadfield et al., 2006). If young people resilience is not only measure by the competence they develop with respect to developmental tasks, but also by the quality of resources available to them (Lerner et al. 2011; Masten, 2001), there seems to be an understanding of the community as a resourceful social space to promote the well-being of young people (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013) and to support and engage young people in positive educational pathways and future prospects.

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