


CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EU POLICY DISCOURSE

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This article will examine the formation of young entrepreneurs as subjects in EU policy and the roles that they have been accorded in policy discourse. The analysis traces the critical lines of policy thinking through select policy documents that portray the evolution of the EU's particular conceptualisations of youth entrepreneurship as well as young entrepreneurs as policy subjects – focusing primarily on the overlapping policy arenas of entrepreneurship and youth. The discussion also examines the normative connotations ascribed to youth entrepreneurship in EU policy discourse, focusing on the links made between youth entrepreneurship and the economic crisis in EU policy.

Keywords: youth entrepreneurship, European Union, EU policy discourse, crisis

INTRODUCTION

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE), a cross-border exchange programme funded by the European Union (EU) that is meant to match new or aspiring entrepreneurs with mentors from other member states, celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2019. Over the previous decade, the programme received 21,000 applications from entrepreneurs from all over the European Union, resulting in over 7,000 matches between young entrepreneurs and host entrepreneurs. Furthermore, 36% of all new entrepreneurs that completed the programme went on to create their own businesses (European Commission 2019). Austrian Member of the European Parliament Dr. Paul Rübig described the significance of EYE and the success of young entrepreneurs for the EU on the occasion of its 10th anniversary with the following words: "A successful and prospering Europe is based on the entrepreneurial spirit from innovative, creative, and

risk-taking youth who realize their dreams and become entrepreneurs. It is important that the European Union supports this spirit, as entrepreneurship is key to economic success and societal wealth" (ibid.:4).

This excerpt exemplifies how young entrepreneurs, as ideal economic actors, are depicted in EU policy discourse. This article examines the formation of young entrepreneurs as subjects in EU discourse and the shifting roles that they have ascribed in evolving policies linked to youth and entrepreneurship. The decade from 2009–2019 mentioned above represents the period during which the concept of youth entrepreneurship took on specific, strongly normative meanings in EU strategies and programmes aimed at helping the EU recover from the global economic crisis set in motion in 2008. Working from an understanding that youth entrepreneurship is accorded many different meanings and is not limited to any single locale or context, the following analysis focuses on the culturally and historically specific formulations of young entrepreneurs as policy actors particular to the European Union.¹ The EU's focus on specific forms of entrepreneurship began to emerge during a specific set of circumstances and within the framework of the political projects that, in different ways, implement the ongoing project of EU integration. The evolving, nuanced discourse on youth entrepreneurship is articulated and published in numerous EU policy documents, papers, and strategies. Far from being mere expressions of intent, these documents provide the backbone for concrete policies and programmes meant to realise particular visions of entrepreneurship and prosperity within the member states, sometimes even beyond the borders of the EU.

The following analysis centres on tracing the key lines of policy thinking that gave rise to the EU's particular conceptualisations of youth entrepreneurship – focusing primarily on the overlapping policy arenas of entrepreneurship and youth. An analysis of the discursive productions of youth entrepreneurship articulated in select texts and papers maps out the broader referential framework in which young entrepreneurs are constituted as policy actors. Insights from research conducted in the anthropology of the EU, the anthropology of policy, and the anthropology of crisis serve as the springboard for examining the normative dimensions of EU discourses on entrepreneurship and the roles accorded to young entrepreneurs making their way in a (post-) crisis world.

¹ This research was carried out within the scope of the research project titled *Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism: An Ethnological Study of Entrepreneurship and Ethics of Young People in Modern-day Slovenia (J6-1804)* – funded by the Slovenian Research Agency. For more on young Slovenian entrepreneurs as emergent social actors and the development of entrepreneurship in uncertain contemporary times, see Kozorog 2018, 2019 and Vodopivec 2018.

EXAMINING THE EUROPEAN UNION: BUILDING EUROPE THROUGH POLICY

The EU was initially founded as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 to form a common market for coal and steel, the natural resources needed to make munitions. This was the first of the EU's numerous economic initiatives designed with broader political implications as well as strong moral overtones. The creation of economic interdependence by establishing a common market for select resources was meant to render war "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (Schuman 1950) at a time when European nations were still recovering from the ravages of the Second World War. Since then, the EU has often employed economic or political mechanisms to establish new forms of interdependence and cooperation among its member states to expand and deepen EU integration.

Analysing the diverse dimensions of EU integration as a normative project as well as a set of overlapping processes that reconfigure the relations among member states has been central to anthropological research on the European Union. As Demossier explains, anthropologists researching the European Union examine the cultural dimensions of ostensibly political processes and practices (Demossier 2012), which they examine in social terms. Such an approach facilitates transcending the notion of the EU as operating in terms of strictly top-down processes unfolding in a self-evident manner to portray how they are multiply defined and often contested at numerous levels. Ethnographic studies thus address the interplay between the views from above and below (Wilson 1998), regardless of the sites chosen for research. As Borneman and Fowler (1997) have mapped out, these sites range widely – from the corridors of EU institutions at the centre and communities located throughout Europe to borders, be they between member states or at the EU's margins.²

Regardless of the site and themes examined, such an approach facilitates critical engagement with the terms and discourses with which the EU defines itself (see, for example, McDonald 1996; Abélès 2004; Wilson 2012), including in relation to identity politics and the normative connotations ascribed to European identity.³

² Anthropology of the EU is one of many veins of research that comprise the anthropology of Europe, the history of which far transcends the boundaries of this article. For more on an overview of anthropological research focused on the EU, see, among others: Wilson and Smith 1993; Goddard et al. 1994; Bellier and Wilson 2000; Demossier 2012; Wilken 2012.

³ The normative connotations accorded to European identity and the examination of identity politics within EU institutions has been the subject of considerable research; see, among others: Abélès et al. 1993; McDonald 1997; Bellier 2000; Holmes 2000, 2009; Zabusky 2000; Abélès 2004; Bajuk Senčar 2009, 2014; Rozanska 2011.

Research in this vein also extends to the study of EU policies, which, as technologies of governance used to implement strategies of EU integration, contain “normative claims used to present a particular way of defining a problem and its solution, as if these were the only ones possible” (Shore and Wright 1997:3). As Shore and Wright argue, policy has become one of the key instruments in the organisation of contemporary societies. Policies also categorise individuals in diverse ways, ascribing to them a range of different roles and statuses (*ibid.*:4). Furthermore, policies connect individuals classified as policy actors into complex power and resource relations that facilitate the transmission of resources or advice (Wedel and Feldman 2005).

Anthropological research centred on the policies of the EU (including, among others, Shore 2000; Thedvall 2006; Garzon 2007; Holmes 2009; Demossier 2012, 2016) demonstrates the use of diverse methods to link policies to the discourses, actors, and institutions involved in their production and implementation into what Shore and Wright term “policy worlds” (Shore and Wright 2011). As Bilge Firat argues, anthropological inquiries into policies emphasise the significance of the cultural interpretative framework in which policymakers – including EU officials – operate (Firat 2014). An important aspect of this framework comprises the discourses, categories, and metaphors that underpin policy and policy documents (Wedel and Feldman 2005). Such written documents represent traces of what Irène Bellier describes – paraphrasing Mary Douglas – as an institution’s “thinking activity” (Bellier 2005:243).

Building on the argument that the genre of policy language is also a form and source of policy power that is meant to organise and persuade rather than inform (Apthorpe 1997), this analysis will examine the evolution of youth entrepreneurship as well as the emergence of young entrepreneurs as policy subjects in EU policy discourse. To this end, it traces a genealogy of youth entrepreneurship through selected EU institutional documents and political declarations spanning decades – more specifically, from 1964 to 2020. In so doing, this discussion identifies the main narrative and referential frameworks in which the categories of youth entrepreneurship and young entrepreneurs emerge as well as their normative connotations.

The analysis of the narrative genealogy and analysis of youth entrepreneurship also build upon anthropological research on crisis, primarily those works that examine the experiences of the latest financial crisis in the EU (including Knight and Stewart 2016; Pina-Cabral 2018; Raudon and Shore 2018; Kozorog 2019) and the operation of the EU’s narrative frameworks of crisis (including Wilson 2010; Firat 2014; Gkintidis 2016). More specifically, it is inspired by Janet Roitman’s research on the operation of crisis as a normative rhetorical or narrative mechanism, which serves to invoke what she terms moments of truth that rhetorically facilitate “the questioning of the epistemological or ethical grounds of certain domains of life and thought” (Roitman

2014:4). Research in this vein serves to frame the narrative implications that the invocation of crisis in policy documents has for the evolving discursive formation of youth entrepreneurship and the status accorded to young entrepreneurs within the EU.

THE HISTORY OF YOUNG EUROPEANS IN EU POLICY

The interest in young people as a group for EU policymakers reaches back to the 1960s. A Council decision in 1963 called for the development of a common vocational training policy (European Council 1963). The first of numerous joint programmes to encourage the exchange of so-called “young workers” within the then European Community was adopted in 1964. The category of young workers included young trainees or interns between 18 and 30 years of age who already had some basic training in their field. The travel financed through the exchange programme was intended to offer them a temporary position in another member state in order for them to improve their professional training as well as “broaden their cultural, linguistic, and human knowledge [translation mine]” (European Council 1964). Subsequent programmes in the 1970s and 1980s built upon this template and employed the mechanism of exchange to offer opportunities for professional training in other member states for young Europeans.

By the late 1970s, the policy interests in young people expanded to address concerns relating to the perceived growing unemployment among young Europeans and the lack of necessary training/education needed to attain employment. The Council of the European Communities, meeting with the education ministers of member states, adopted a resolution to address this issue and the “grave problems facing so many young people in the transition from school to adult and working life” (European Council 1976). In particular, this resolution centred on the role of educational systems in member states to adequately prepare for young people, outlining a plan of action to be taken at the EU and national levels to develop policies to improve the education and training of young people, an issue that remains a priority to the present day.

The focus on education and informal training for young people making the transition to adulthood continued to characterise later youth programmes that ran continually from the late 1980s. While they have expanded over the years, they still employ various forms of exchange to offer new employment, educational (Erasmus), or vocational opportunities (including voluntary service) to young people. At the same time, these exchanges are depicted as a means of “enabling young people to understand more about the European Community and its Member States and of promoting social cohesion within the Community” (European Council 1991:25). With the exception of this last statement – which refers to goals that seem to serve the EU itself – the aim of these

programmes is to address the challenges that EU institutions have identified as facing young people on their way to full-fledged adulthood.

RECENT FORMULATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A POLICY PRIORITY IN THE EU

The existence of a Directorate-General in the European Commission dedicated in part to entrepreneurship (DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs) indicates the relevance that the Commission accords to entrepreneurship, which has considerable roots within EU policy. This short genealogy maps out the renewed priority accorded to entrepreneurship by the EU – focused on policy developments over the last two decades – and frames the emergence of youth entrepreneurship as a category in a more direct manner.

A pronounced shift towards entrepreneurship in EU policy was set in motion at a special European Council meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal in March 2000, at which EU leaders agreed to adopt a new strategy to help the EU better respond to the challenges of a knowledge-driven economy: the Lisbon Agenda (European Council 2000). As a result, the General Affairs Council of the Council of the European Union drafted the European Charter for Small Enterprises, which was approved by member state leaders later that year.⁴ This charter represents a statement on the part of EU member states to support the bolstering of entrepreneurship and the creation of an environment friendly to small businesses and entrepreneurs as part of a broader strategy to revitalise the economy of the EU. The argument of the charter hinges on the thesis that (small) enterprises and entrepreneurship are crucial elements of the EU's economy:

Small enterprises are the backbone of the European economy. They are a key source of jobs and a breeding ground for business ideas. Europe's efforts to usher in the new economy will succeed only if small business is brought to the top of the agenda [...] Small enterprises must be considered as a main driver for innovation, employment as well as social and local integration in Europe. The best possible environment for small business and entrepreneurship needs therefore to be created. (European Commission 2002:1)

⁴ The General Affairs Council is one of the ten configurations of the Council of the European Union, or Council, which is one of seven EU institutions and one of the EU's main decision-making institutions. It is composed of the European affairs ministers from all EU member states. On the other hand, the European Council consists of the heads of state or government of EU member states; they meet approximately four times a year to set the EU's political agenda.

The policy document that follows up on the charter, a political statement of support for small enterprises, was the green paper drafted by the European Commission on entrepreneurship in Europe (European Commission 2003). The green paper outlines the Commission's definition of entrepreneurship, its evaluation of the state of entrepreneurship in the EU and its importance for the EU's economy, and its plans for policy development.

More importantly, all these points are framed within a historical narrative – specifically, a response to a particular juncture in EU history. The Commission depicts the EU as on the brink of significant change that requires an entrepreneurial response. This historical juncture is defined as the confluence of numerous structural changes in the world economy and upcoming changes to the Internal Market of the EU. The changes that form part of this historical framing include, on the one hand, a shift from large firms predominating the world economy to growing numbers of smaller firms over the last decade and, on the other, a shift towards increased levels of production based on technological or knowledge-based inputs or activities. In addition, the report also emphasises the fact that the EU at that moment was on the brink of its most significant expansion thus far, with the EU's Internal Market increasing from 380 million to 450 million after the enlargement of 2004.

These great changes are presented in the green paper as “opportunities for new entrepreneurial initiative” to be capitalised on by increasing the number of entrepreneurs and small businesses – which only underlines the need to provide the environment necessary for entrepreneurship to flourish. Creating such an environment would result from a coordinated policy approach composed of three pillars: bringing down barriers to business development and growth, balancing the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship, and becoming a society that values entrepreneurship (European Commission 2003).

THE EMERGENCE OF YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS AS ECONOMIC ACTORS

While the green paper does argue for the need to encourage entrepreneurship among all members of society, it does not explicitly address young entrepreneurs as a specific group. The first policy document that makes a case for youth entrepreneurship is the European Commission's *Small Business Act for Europe* (SBA), in which the Commission proposes a partnership between the EU and its member states to create a comprehensive policy framework building on measures implemented at the EU or national levels since 2000. While the historical framing of the EU and its economy does not differ greatly in this document, the SBA does introduce entrepreneurs as ideal figures needed in a Europe facing change and uncertainty:

Dynamic entrepreneurs are particularly well placed to reap opportunities from globalisation and from the acceleration of technological change. Our capacity to build on the growth and innovation potential of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will therefore be decisive for the future prosperity of the EU [...] Vibrant SMEs will make Europe more robust to stand against the uncertainty thrown up in the globalised world of today. (European Commission 2008:2)

Young entrepreneurs are introduced in the SBA against the backdrop of another structural change facing the EU in the following decade: the retirement of an entire generation – an estimated 6 million – of small business owners. Highlighting the future loss of these businesses during a period of economic change and uncertainty is meant to render the significance of policy goals such as the creation of a friendly environment that facilitates the realisation of entrepreneurs' (youth, women, immigrants) potential more immediate and tangible:

The EU and Member States should create an environment within which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded. They need to care for future entrepreneurs better, in particular by fostering entrepreneurial interest and talent, particularly among young people and women, and by simplifying the conditions for business transfers. (European Commission 2008:5)

The SBA outlines several policy measures to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment among the young as an attractive career option. These include teaching entrepreneurial skills and promoting entrepreneurship as a possible vocation in schools as well as launching Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, the mentoring and exchange programme between young and established entrepreneurs, founded in 2009.

YOUTH AND CRISIS AS A NARRATIVE MECHANISM

While SBA was published after the onset of the global economic crisis, it did not address the crisis per se but built on the plans and strategies of previous policy documents intending to revitalise the economy by bolstering entrepreneurship on numerous levels. Both the green paper and the SBA are structured around the depiction of entrepreneurs as a crucial group of economic actors and the environment in which they operate, which encourages entrepreneurship among different groups of social actors – including young Europeans. The strategies laid out in the SBA thus

accord young entrepreneurs – as well as potential young entrepreneurs – with a status that enables them to participate in EU programmes and policies aimed at aiding young entrepreneurs in their endeavours by providing various services, including expert advice, training, and mentoring.

However, the onset of the crisis and its effects on Europe's youth significantly reconfigured the narrative frame by which policies concerning youth and young entrepreneurs had been defined. As outlined above, Europe's young people have been addressed as a significant social group in EU policy for over 40 years. Yet, the effects of the economic crisis on the challenges facing Europe's youth – particularly those hindering their transition into the adult workforce – rendered them an even stronger priority, as is apparent in the European Commission policy initiative titled *Youth on the Move: An Initiative to Unleash the Potential of Young People to Achieve Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in the European Union*. One of the biggest problems brought about by the crisis in Europe highlighted in this initiative is the high rate of youth unemployment, evidence that the crisis affected certain groups more strongly than others.

The Europe 2020 Strategy sets ambitious objectives for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. Young people are essential to achieve this. Quality education and training, successful labour market integration and more mobility of young people are key to unleashing all young people's potential and achieving the Europe 2020 objectives. Europe's future prosperity depends on its young people. There are close to 100 million in the EU, representing a fifth of its total population. Despite the unprecedented opportunities which modern Europe offers, young people face challenges – aggravated by the economic crisis – in education and training systems and in accessing the labour market. Youth unemployment is unacceptably high at almost 21 %. In order to reach the 75 % employment target for the population aged 20-64 years, the transition of young people to the labour market needs to be radically improved. (European Commission 2010a:2)

Citing the effects of the crisis on Europe's youth – underlined by statistical data – also highlights the urgency of many of the issues that EU policies from the 1970s onward have identified as problematic for young Europeans and have tried to address. While these problems were earlier identified as specific to youth as a sector of the population of the EU, the crisis is depicted as exacerbating the existing challenges facing Europe's youth to such a degree that it has become a more systemic issue or general concern. As a result, the state of the youth – which represents one fifth of the EU's population – has become essential to the prosperity of all Europeans.

This initiative addressed long-term challenges – such as quality education and training and successful transitions into the labour market – that had been mentioned in previous youth policy documents, but the presented data emphasised the level of urgency concerning Europe's youth in light of the economic crisis. In addition to the crisis serving within the initiative's narrative to mark what Roitman terms a "moment of truth" (Roitman 2014), the initiative also refers to the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy to recover from the economic crisis as criteria for assessing the present state of affairs.⁵ Reference to the Europe 2020 objectives only emphasises the initiative's teleological structure.

Another of the Europe 2020 objectives that frames the initiative's narrative is related to the level of education and training among young people, who need to attain employment in a rapidly changing economy that has (and will have) an ever-higher number of jobs requiring high-level qualifications:

Fewer than one person in three in the EU (31.1 %) has a higher education degree compared to over 40 % in the US and over 50 % in Japan. The EU has a lower share of researchers in the labour force than its competitors. The Europe 2020 Strategy has agreed the EU headline target that by 2020, at least 40 % of 30-34 years olds should have completed tertiary or equivalent education. Too many young people leave school early, increasing their risk of becoming unemployed or inactive, living in poverty and causing high economic and social costs. Currently, 14.4 % of 18-24 years old in the EU have less than upper secondary education and are not in further education and training. (European Commission 2010a:2)

In order to effectively address the situation of young people in the EU after the economic crisis, one of the main pillars of the *Youth on the Move* strategy is to support reforms in existing education and training systems in coordination with activities taking place at the national and regional levels – including transnational EU programmes promoting education/training and employment mobility. A vital element of this strategy involves supporting young entrepreneurs and self-employment, the latter becoming a significant form of employment in the present and future labour markets:

Self-employment offers a valuable opportunity for young people to make use of their skills and shape their own job. It is also an option to be

⁵ *EUROPE 2020: A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* was drafted by the European Commission as a European exit strategy from the global economic and financial crisis that started in 2008; it defines three main priorities and five objectives for the EU to attain by 2020 on employment, education, social inclusion, research and development, and climate and energy (European Commission 2010b).

considered seriously by those helping young people to plan their career paths. The interest and potential of young people to become entrepreneurs needs to be strongly encouraged by fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and attitudes in education and training [...] To this end, young people need more opportunities to have entrepreneurial experiences, to receive support and guidance on business plans, access to start-up capital and coaching within the starting period. (European Commission 2010a:14)

Given that *Youth on the Move* is a post-crisis strategy aimed solely at young people, it is not surprising that young entrepreneurs are recognised as a significant group whose specific situation is addressed in policy terms. However, in the following years, entrepreneurship in general, and young entrepreneurs in particular, became priorities in broader post-crisis reforms strategies developed by EU institutions. One of the European Commission strategies that confirmed the policy significance of entrepreneurship in Europe was published in 2013, titled *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan: Reigniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit in Europe* (European Commission 2013a). This document represents the most comprehensive strategy for entrepreneurial development to date, which also spells out the ideal role that entrepreneurs can play in a recovering, post-crisis economy. It also most clearly maps out the economic situation facing the EU in 2013, which includes the long-term structural changes mentioned in previous documents as well as the aftermath of the economic crisis. The depiction of this situation serves as a historical-economic frame for broad-based entrepreneurial reform as well as an invocation of crisis that serves as an opportunity to introduce broad-based reforms.

Before the on-going economic and financial crisis, the European economy faced structural challenges to its competitiveness and growth, and obstacles to entrepreneurship. Many of these persist, but the crisis has also been a catalyst for deep change and restructuring. The world economy has also been transformed over the last decade [...] The Europe 2020 Strategy responded to this by setting out the foundations for future growth and competitiveness that will be smart, sustainable and inclusive, and which would address our principal societal challenges [...] To bring Europe back to growth and higher levels of employment, Europe needs more entrepreneurs. (European Commission 2013a:3)

In addition, this action plan spells out how entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship could serve as an engine for future growth and competitiveness in the face of deep-seated changes brought about by restructuring and the crisis – all of which is couched

in undoubtedly normative terms:

Entrepreneurship is a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation: it creates new companies and jobs, opens up new markets, and nurtures new skills and capabilities [...] Entrepreneurship makes economies more competitive and innovative and is crucial in achieving the objectives of several European sectorial policies [...] New companies, especially SMEs, represent the most important source of new employment: they create more than 4 million new jobs every year in Europe. Yet the engine for this recovery has been stuttering: since 2004, the share of people preferring self-employment to being an employee has dropped in 23 out of the 27 EU Member States. While three years ago for 45% of Europeans self-employment was their first choice, now this percentage is down to 37%. By contrast in the USA and China this proportion is much higher: 51% and 56% respectively. (European Commission 2013a:3–4)

In this passage, one can observe the juxtaposition of the ideal view of entrepreneurship and its reality: on the one hand, there is the importance accorded to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs as drivers of economic growth and creators of jobs and, on the other, the current condition of entrepreneurship in Europe, compared to that of the USA and China. It is this discrepancy that the strategy aims to address – particularly in light of the goals that the EU has set in terms of economic recovery that were mentioned previously. The discrepancy and comparison underline the aim of the strategy to raise the number of entrepreneurs in Europe. The structure of the strategy is two-fold: on the one hand, the EU aims to build on existing measures to make the existing business environment more conducive for entrepreneurs; on the other hand, it intends to employ a range of measures to improve what it refers to as the culture in Europe, which does not necessarily favour entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship:

[...] there is also a widespread culture that does not recognise or reward entrepreneurial endeavours enough and does not celebrate successful entrepreneurs as role models who create jobs and income. To make entrepreneurship the growth engine of our economy Europe needs a thorough, far-reaching cultural change. (European Commission 2013a:4)

In addition to strengthening entrepreneurial education and improving the business environment for entrepreneurs, the strategy includes the revitalisation of entrepreneurial culture as one of the three main goals that would encourage entrepreneurs in Europe. What is important to note here is that young entrepreneurs do not only appear as a demographic group that requires extra support – along with

seniors, women, the unemployed, and migrants. Europe's youth are addressed in all three strategy goals, which in diverse ways offer aid to existing young entrepreneurs as well as facilitate the training and formation of future young entrepreneurs. This is realised through a range of measures and programmes, including those that focus on incorporating entrepreneurial skills and training in existing education curricula, mentoring potential entrepreneurs, or helping diminish existing barriers for young entrepreneurs in the business environment.

The comprehensive inclusion of young entrepreneurs in EU youth policy was underlined by another landmark declaration issued the same year by the Council, titled *The Youth Guarantee*, which focuses on young Europeans whose employment situation had become ever more precarious due to the crisis (European Council 2013). This declaration was published a month after the European Commission published the *Youth Employment Initiative* (YEI) in March 2013, the latest of a series of policy packages and initiatives meant to respond to historically high levels of youth unemployment. The YEI provided substantial funding from the European Structural Funds for the period 2014–2020; these funds were also earmarked to cover the costs of the *Youth Guarantee*, which was published a month later (European Commission 2013b).

The proposed guarantee, implemented at the level of member states, was designed to help all European youth between the ages of 15 and 24 classified as NEETs (neither in employment, education, or training). The EU guaranteed them a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or traineeship within a period of four months after finishing compulsory education. These offers could include entrepreneurial traineeships, education, or support. The guarantee is presented as a form of investment in young Europeans meant to offer long-term benefits, which far outweigh the potential costs and problems that the Commission depicts as that resulting from long-term unemployment among young Europeans:

30.1% of unemployed people under the age of 25 years in the Union have been unemployed for more than 12 months. Furthermore, an increasing number of young people do not actively seek employment, which may leave them without structural support in terms of getting back into the labour market. Research shows that youth unemployment can result in permanent scars, such as increased risk of future unemployment, reduced levels of future earnings, loss of human capital, intergenerational transmission of poverty, or less motivation to found a family, contributing to negative demographic trends. (European Council 2013:1)

The Youth Guarantee schemes, which were to be implemented at the level of Member States, are presented as innovative strategies intended to combat the long-

term causes of unemployment; these strategies are to be structured along specific axes of operation.⁶ One of these, which focuses on measures enabling labour market integration, centred on financing school programmes, vocational training centres, and employment services to promote and provide guidance on entrepreneurship and self-employment for young people. In addition to priority being accorded to entrepreneurial training, support for young entrepreneurs was singled out as a particularly relevant goal of the national guarantee schemes – alongside the sustainable integration of NEETs into the labour market.

The European *Youth Guarantee* – which has been reinforced and built on with subsequent policy initiatives – marks a significant shift in the framing of young entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship. In subsequent years, they emerge primarily in policy documents dedicated primarily to the long-term problem of youth unemployment exacerbated in a post-crisis Europe. One such example is the European Commission's more recent policy initiative titled *Youth Employment Support: A Bridge for Jobs for the Next Generation* (European Commission 2020), which was published after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy document reinforced the Commission's resolve to continue making young people a policy priority "because young people are the next generation and deserve all the new opportunities to develop their full potential to shape the future of our continent" (European Commission 2020:1). At the same time, the document states that young people were disproportionately impacted by the recession caused by the first wave of the pandemic. As a result, one out of six young persons had to stop working during the lockdown. Young entrepreneurs and the development of entrepreneurial skills are portrayed as an important aspect of the Commission's recovery strategy:

Supporting self-employment is another important means of speeding up labour market recovery. However, young people largely lack the networks to give them access to, for instance, business finance and entrepreneurial skills. Through meaningful exchanges of best practices, existing networks for aspiring young entrepreneurs at national and local level will be strengthened. Such networks bring nascent entrepreneurs into contact with businesses, role models, incubators and other local start-up support services. (European Commission 2020:4)

While previous, crisis-infused discourse accorded young entrepreneurs with

⁶ While Youth Guarantees were first implemented in the Nordic countries in the 1980s and 1990s, the European Youth Guarantee was the first of its kind to be implemented at a transnational scale. For more on the history and implementation of Youth Guarantees as a form of labour policy, see Escudero and López Mourelo 2017.

an ideal role in revitalising the economy, in this last case, young entrepreneurs are depicted as economic actors who have attained the skills necessary to survive and potentially thrive in a post-pandemic economy. The value of continuing to finance the programmes that facilitate the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills or the mentoring and aid of young entrepreneurs is associated with their potential effectiveness in helping young Europeans acquire a certain level of resilience in uncertain times and avert a

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The previous pages provide a genealogy of the EU's evolving approach to youth entrepreneurship and of young entrepreneurs as policy subjects through a narrative analysis of select EU policy documents in which young entrepreneurs figure most strongly. Upon briefly sketching out the roots of the EU's approach to youth and its recent prioritisation of entrepreneurship, the analysis maps out how young entrepreneurs became subjects of EU policy and ideal subjects of economic change. However, the linearity that a genealogy implies is partially retroactive in nature, as it does not address the specific contexts and processes involved in the production of each document or the specific purposes these documents were meant to fulfil. Yet, the tracing of an evolution provides insights into EU institutions' "thinking activities" – to return to Mary Douglas and Irène Bellier – in that it depicts the ways that changing circumstances and priorities are defined and positioned in relation to the institutions' existing "policy world" (Shore and Wright 2011). Part of this world is portrayed in the complex, evolving network of policy documents in which the EU depicts how it aims to inform numerous aspects of social, political, and economic life. The evolving EU policy framework is both political and legalistic in nature, based on precedents set by previous documents that are, in turn, laid out in most subsequent documents and serve as a framing mechanism and a tool for demonstrating each new document's relevance. The changing conceptualisation of youth entrepreneurship within this evolving policy network shapes culturally specific understandings of young entrepreneurs (otherwise an abstract or universal concept) in policy terms.

Furthermore, analysis of these genealogies traces the evolution of concepts, positions, and strategies over time concerning certain issues – and in the face of changing contexts and challenges. Moreover, they offer a window into the development of policy positions as a social process, which aid in dismantling the prevailing image of the EU as a monolithic, top-down entity.

The analytical discussion of the chosen policy documents demonstrates the emergence of young entrepreneurs in EU policy discourse and their formation as

a priority in various policy areas, each with its own agendas, strategies, and policy programmes. The fact that one can track young entrepreneurs as subjects of policy in multiple arenas implies that their formation as policy actors is not necessarily coherent. Their discursive constitution in different streams of EU policy is contingent upon the diverse ways that policies evolve in response to shifting economic, political, and social circumstances.

The normative policy discourses that were discussed, in which formulations of young entrepreneurs are defined, result from two streams of EU policy: youth policy and policy regarding entrepreneurship. As depicted in the analysis, youth policy began by focusing primarily on facilitating the transition of young people into the workforce and providing appropriate professional training through mechanisms of exchange among member states. The arena of youth policy has vastly expanded over the years and decades, yet the priority accorded to aiding young Europeans in their efforts to find employment has remained a constant over the years. Within the evolving, broad-based strategy addressing the challenge of youth unemployment, youth entrepreneurship has emerged as a vital policy strategy.

Young entrepreneurs are constituted in a different manner in the policy strategies focused primarily on entrepreneurialism, which was depicted as a crucial element in plans to revitalise the economies of EU member states. Within the broad-based strategy to address the development of entrepreneurialism in the economies and societies of EU member states, policies focused on the untapped entrepreneurial potential of numerous social groups. These include young entrepreneurs, who, by nature of their age and lack of experience, are depicted as facing particular obstacles and thus in need of specific forms of aid and support; at the same time, they are depicted as a crucial group economically speaking, as a whole generation of entrepreneurs will be retiring in most EU economies.

These two sets of policy discussions, which overlap in certain areas and respond to similar problems or challenges, contribute to the formation of youth entrepreneurs as subjects in EU policy. In addition, they are both strongly informed by the invocation of crisis that operates as a normative narrative mechanism for introducing change. These invocations differ in important ways as, in some cases, they endow young entrepreneurs with some measure of agency. In others, they are depicted as a social group in need of additional policy support and aid. In the case of entrepreneurship policy, the economic crisis, which in Roitman's terms is narratively depicted as a moment of truth, purportedly demonstrates that the EU economies and societies have not offered the necessary support for the development of entrepreneurialism. Young entrepreneurs, in this case, are ascribed an enormous potential for helping to revitalise EU economies and are thus deserving of policy support and aid. At the same

time, the crisis serves as a justification for drafting a comprehensive strategy to aid in developing a culture of entrepreneurship on numerous levels.

The crisis invoked in the case of youth policy is linked to how the economic crisis disproportionately affected the EU's youth, thus exacerbating existing problems concerning youth unemployment. Thus, the crisis was not a generalised one but instead affected one particular group in the EU. Within this context, supporting youth entrepreneurship and self-employment is depicted as a potentially effective strategy for addressing specific aspects of the broad-based issue of youth unemployment – and thus worthy of particular attention from policymakers. The final documents discussed, which were drafted after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic effects of the first pandemic lockdown, address a different sort of crisis. In this case, the employment strategy for young Europeans is framed against the backdrop of a renewed or second crisis experienced by young Europeans, who already had long-standing problems concerning proper education and employment. In this case, the crisis serves to highlight the argued need to aid young Europeans, whose welfare directly informs the stability and wellbeing of Europe's future.

The diverse positioning of young entrepreneurs within narratives of policy and crisis seems to accord them with different levels and formulations of agency, which results in the complex, shifting positioning of young entrepreneurs as policy actors embedded within the networks of EU policies as well as programmes and strategies. Mapping out this evolving positioning, both in terms of discourse and networks, provides important insights into the referential universe that these policies create and the relational positioning of young entrepreneurs, at least at the level of policy. As anthropologist Cris Shore has argued in an interview (Durão 2010:605), examining the trajectory of policy in terms of its genealogy and language are vital steps to understanding the policy as a cultural framework. However, understanding how it operates at the level of practice involves examining how it is translated into practice and institutionalised. At this level, numerous young entrepreneurs engage daily with the EU through specialised institutions and programmes. Further analysis in this vein can then shed light on how this complex narrative framework operates outside the realm of discourse and across different EU member states at the level of everyday practice.

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Konceptualiziranje poduzetništva mladih u diskursu politike Europske unije

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U radu se promišlja proces konstruiranja mladih poduzetnika kao subjekata u politici Europske unije i uloge koje su im dodijeljene u političkom diskursu. Analiza prati kritične točke političkog razmišljanja kroz odabrane dokumente o politici koji prikazuju razvoj zasebnih konceptualizacija poduzetništva mladih u Europskoj uniji, kao i mladih poduzetnika kao subjekata politike. Autorica se usredotočuje prvenstveno na preklapajuća područja politike poduzetništva i politike mladih. Rasprava također ispituje normative konotacije koje se upisuju u poduzetništvo mladih u diskursu politike Europske unije, s naglaskom na poveznicama između poduzetništva mladih i ekonomske krize u politici Unije.

Ključne riječi: *poduzetništvo mladih, Europska unija, diskurs politike Europske unije, kriza*



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