

# Wellbeing of Youth in Cluj System Map

This System Map shows the strong interdependence between the various sectors related to wellbeing. If we want to improve wellbeing it is important to understand the dynamics of each sector and how it relates to the other sectors. To improve the system of well-being we cannot optimize isolated sectors (e.g. school infrastructure) but need to improve the relationships between the sectors (e.g. support for teachers, attitude of parents towards schools, learning opportunities outside of school).

## The sectors of the map explained

### Psychological

This sector of the map highlights the inner dynamics of young people. It aims to describe the inner mechanisms to become an aware, purposeful, belonging and confident person and also the dynamics that influence mental health. The inner dynamics are mostly shown in the loop "Personal Growth or Stagnation". A better awareness helps to identify one's place within the world around and improves the sense of purpose. This can improve the sense of belonging as a clearer purpose enables a better sense of the role of a young person in the community and how he/she can contribute. The sense of belonging increases the self-trust which in turn provides the confidence to turn the focus inwards and improve the general awareness. However, outside factors like lack of emotional literacy, problems with mental health, weak relationships, lack of career path seem to negatively influence the loop so that this loop currently works in reverse and leads to a stagnation of personal development of young people. Mental health plays a crucial role when it comes to well-being. There is a strong interdependence with the inner dynamics of a young person (loop "Losing touch with oneself"). A low awareness of oneself can hinder the mental resilience one has to cope with mental problems. Therefore, challenges to mental health can lead to higher stress and anxiety. This can deteriorate self-trust and therefore the ability to look inside and become more self-aware. Mental health is also strongly affected by the other sectors particularly personal relationships, physical health, and quality of living.

### Physical

Physical health is influenced by the amount of health threats and their treatment, as well as the physical resilience of the person. Physical resilience is a key factor in this area, which can be strengthened through activities in nature and sport. Overall physical health has a strong influence on mental health, and also influences health literacy. Nutrition plays an important part when it comes to physical health. Here the adoption of a healthy & nutritious diet is the crucial factor. The nutrition and the behaviour of youth towards it is influenced by the accessibility of healthy nutrition at school but also at home but also through the youth literacy in terms of health. When it comes to accessibility of nutritious food in schools, it is required that the political strategy understands the importance of the topic and provides more funding for schools to promote and implement more healthy food. This is also true for the availability of health promotion & prevention programs outside of schools that need political support and funding. Literacy and education of the family members are a big driver for the amount of healthy food at home. The economic situation of the family or of the young person itself can prevent the access to healthy food, as healthy food seems to be more expensive and less accessible than processed foods. This supply of healthy food also depends on the regulation of the food market by the government as well as the offer of food companies.

### Interpersonal

Personal relationships are crucial for the sense of belonging and the mental health of young people. These encompass the relationships with friends as well as with family. Building strong relationships requires a certain level of self-trust to meet and engage with other people from the community. Due to cultural influences, there is a general sense of mistrust and strong perception of judgment and failure which might prevent young people from stepping out of their comfort zone and meeting new people. Sense of compassion and the ability to connect with others is also something that young people need to learn and develop. The strong focus on individualism and mistrust in society can hinder the ability to connect. When young people engage with each other, they form new connections and can build strong, reliable relationships. This can have various effects on their well-being. The relationships build a strong support network to improve the resilience of young people and their ability to cope with mental challenges. Relationships also improve the sense of belonging, emotional literacy and self-trust which all together increase the openness and ability of young people to connect with more people from the community and further strengthen their network of interpersonal relationships. A young person requires nurture and support within their family environment to thrive. This requires parents to be aware of the needs of the child, to stay open-minded (even though the intergenerational gap might be widening) and to continuously develop their skills as a parent. At the same time, the family needs stability to nurture a child. Health, economic conditions and risky behavior by the child itself play a crucial role for the stability of the family. With the nurture and support that the child receives, it builds strong relationships with the family members which positively affects their sense of belonging, emotional literacy, self-trust and mental resilience. Furthermore, a nurturing and responsive family acts as a security against bullying and interpersonal violence which also depends on the responsiveness of the school and the discrimination of marginalized communities. Family also has an influence on the social pressure a young person is experiencing. The pressure can also stem from the education system and from peers. Generally, there seems to be a high competition in education and the constant pressure to become part of the elite.

### Society & Environment

1) **Education and learning** seems to play a crucial role for well-being as it has a big impact on the psychological and physical dimensions. Education may provide youth with the environment and ability to learn and to teach themselves - within the formal education system (schools and universities) but also in non-formal settings to build foundation for a lifelong learning. The effectiveness of formal education depends on the motivation and satisfaction with the education system and the accessibility of the education system. Perceived relevance of school education seems to be low which weakens the motivation of students and contributes to high dropout rates. Lack of soft skills in the curriculum and low collaboration with actors outside of school lead to the low relevance of the education regarding profession and personal growth. It was criticized that the education system is too theoretical and insufficiently rooted in everyday life and learning for the future. Another issue is the unequal access to formal education system as economic conditions and neighborhood choices play a large role in who can access quality education. There also seems to be barriers for migrants and refugees to enter the Romanian school system. The effectiveness of non-formal education provides another source for young people to learn and improve their skills. It is enabled through learning spaces where young people can seek knowledge and experiment. Learning also takes place in the engagement within the community to learn from others and to explore different skills. Youth does not seem to have a generally positive attitude towards learning. This largely depends on the perceived value that their parents and society in general is putting on education and learning, is largely influenced by the attitude of the society and of their parents. A sense of purpose increases motivation to learn.

2) **The Career section** is divided into the ability to create one's own income and whether young people can find purposeful careers. The ability to create income requires a certain amount of professional skills and general availability of jobs. Risky behavior can lower the ability to find and follow work. Finding a suitable occupation, on the other hand, requires self-reflection and awareness to make informed career decisions. Vocational guidance with the support of school, family and work-related communities can help young people to get to know career options and how they might fit to themselves. Finding a suitable occupation and pursuing a meaningful career path creates a sense of purpose. A higher sense of purpose increases the motivation to learn, hence further increasing the professional skills. It also leads to an improved self-trust which is also needed to find and secure a suitable occupation. However, if young people have the feeling that they don't follow a meaningful path and don't find a suitable job it can have the opposite effect. Career might become less important for them and they lose motivation to put effort in learning professional skills and finding a suitable career.

3) **Economic situation** of family and youth influences many parts of the system and hence plays a large, indirect role on the well-being of young people. For younger students the economic situation largely depends on their parents whereas older students might be able to contribute or generate their own income through the professional skills they developed. Economic situation has a big impact on the ability to learn, personal relationships, and mental health as shown in the loops "Possibility to learn has to be earned". The security of income influences in which area a young person lives and how well he/she is connected to quality spaces in the city. Economic security also allows youth to explore alternative career options and hence might increase the chances to identify a suitable and purposeful occupation.

4) **Availability and accessibility of spaces in the city** is a huge topic as not every young person has the same chances to access public spaces. Economic situation is a major factor influencing if young people have access to quality infrastructure in the city such as schools, hospitals and green spaces. Mobility within the city also plays an important role in how well citizens can move within the city. Marginalized groups are often discriminated against and excluded from infrastructure. Therefore, they experience worse treatment related to education, health and relational spaces. Relational spaces provide a safe environment to meet and engage with other people from the community. These spaces are missing, though, because of the low accessibility in the city and because youth & community centres and recreational spaces are missing. Self-organized spaces are lacking resources to be founded or to engage a large number of people. Spaces for intergenerational exchange are also missing.

5) **Natural environment** The natural environment has various influences on the well-being of youth in Cluj. On the one hand, activities and experiences in nature can improve the physical resilience, and having nature (trees, meadows) in the city can for e.g. reduce air pollution and with that reduce potential health threats. On the other hand, having experiences in nature can have positive effects on the general mental health. Through experiencing nature first hand the awards in general can be raised and with that the perceived value of a natural environment. This can lead to more protection of nature by the government and eventually a growing natural environment in/around the city, which then increases again the activity.

6) **Urban Housing** The quality of urban living has a direct impact on mental health and includes components like quality of accommodation, safety and mobility. The sector houses and with it the quality of living in the urban area is influenced by different factors such as the feeling of safety and rate of crime, and the accessibility to public transport and mobility in the city.

