

The Role of Public Associations in Elevating the Legal Culture of Youth: Foreign Experience

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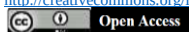
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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how public associations and non-governmental non-profit organizations contribute to the development of legal culture among young people through practical education, civic participation and access to legal support. Its purpose is to identify transferable institutional mechanisms from selected European countries, the United States, the United Kingdom and South Korea, while distinguishing contextual differences that limit direct policy transplantation. The study uses qualitative document review, comparative institutional analysis and thematic synthesis of the examples discussed in the source article. The comparison considers four dimensions: non-formal legal education, experiential participation, digital access and cooperation between government bodies and civil society. Results reveal a recurring set of mechanisms, including Germany's civic education initiatives, the participatory structures of Nordic youth councils, Street Law and simulated judicial proceedings in the United States, youth advocacy forums in the United Kingdom, and digital legal-information activities in South Korea. These examples suggest that legal literacy may be strengthened when instruction is linked to realistic choices, rights-protection procedures and opportunities for meaningful participation. However, program effectiveness depends on accessible delivery, organizational independence, qualified facilitators and continuous evaluation. The article develops recommendations for adapting these practices to local legal and institutional conditions through school-NGO partnerships, legal clinics, interactive tools and youth feedback systems. As a comparative conceptual study, it does not claim to establish causal effects or measure changes in youth behavior; future evaluations should assess outcomes through transparent indicators and longitudinal observation.

Introduction

One of the essential conditions for building a modern civil society and a democratic state governed by the rule of law is a high level of legal culture among the population, particularly among young people. The legal culture of youth encompasses not merely their knowledge of legal principles and access to information, but also their internalized legal values, respect for the law, active civic participation, and an uncompromising attitude toward unlawful behavior. The effective functioning of democratic institutions, the consolidation of public order, and the protection of human rights are directly linked to the level of legal awareness and culture among the younger generation (European Commission, 2019).

From this perspective, enhancing legal culture among youth and expanding their participation in social and political processes has become a top priority for state institutions and civil society organizations worldwide. In this context, public associations, non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs), and youth movements play a uniquely vital role. Serving as a bridge between the state and citizens, public associations offer flexible, responsive, and effective mechanisms for legally educating youth, safeguarding their rights, and fostering their active involvement in public life.

International experience demonstrates that in developed nations, the integration of youth into democratic institutions and the elevation of their legal culture are predominantly driven by the active initiatives and innovative projects of public associations. The practices of European Union member states, the United States, the United Kingdom, and East Asian countries provide rich and diverse models in this domain.

Materials and methods

The research is designed as a qualitative comparative and analytical review of civic and legal education practices. The geographic scope follows the original article: Germany, France, Sweden, Finland, the United States, the United Kingdom and South Korea. These cases are treated as illustrative models of institutional organization rather than as a statistically representative sample of all legal-education systems. The unit of comparison is a mechanism through which public associations engage young people, not an assumed national ranking. The analysis groups the source material into four themes: (1) access to understandable legal information; (2) practical and participatory training; (3) institutional opportunities for young people to express their interests; and (4) public–civil society coordination and financing. Documentary descriptions are interpreted through comparative-legal and thematic methods. The study separates reported examples from proposed policy responses, and does not infer the impact of individual programs on crime or trust without independent outcome evidence.

For analytical consistency, each case is considered against common questions: Who delivers the program? Which legal competences are addressed? How does participation occur? What resources and institutional arrangements support continuation? Which elements might be adapted in settings with different legal traditions and administrative capacity? The review treats legal culture as a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge of rights and obligations, skills to seek lawful remedies, respect for legal institutions, critical evaluation of information and informed civic participation. This operational definition prevents the analysis from reducing legal culture to memorization of legislation. Its main limitation is reliance on secondary descriptions rather than original interviews, program files, test scores or controlled comparisons.

The normative basis includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes children's rights to express views and access information, and the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. These documents provide a useful reference for evaluating inclusion and participatory approaches; they do not imply that every model operates under identical legal requirements. The ensuing analysis therefore reports transferable design principles rather than universal prescriptions.

Results: comparative foreign experience

1. European Union Practice: Germany, France, and the Nordic Model

Across the European Union, the European Youth Forum and its constituent national youth councils play a leading role in enhancing legal culture and integrating young people into civil society. Under the framework of the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027), public associations are entrusted with improving legal literacy among young citizens and educating them in the spirit of human rights and democratic values (European Youth Forum, 2020).

Germany: The German model is particularly instructive. The Federal Youth Council (*Deutscher Bundesjugendring* – DBJR), alongside thousands of regional and local NGOs, engages extensively in youth legal and political education. In collaboration with the Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* – BPB), public associations execute the concept of *Politische Bildung* (Political/Civic Education) (BPB, 2021). This approach transcends the rote memorization of statutes; it focuses on developing critical thinking, a conceptual understanding of human rights, and practical skills for asserting legal rights. German public associations organize interactive simulations such as "Model Bundestag," where young people directly participate in mock legislative processes, debate bills, and gain a practical understanding of how legal norms are crafted. Such experiential learning has proven highly effective in transforming theoretical legal knowledge into practical civic competencies.

France: In France, youth legal education relies on strong collaboration between state bodies and public associations under the framework of secularism and civic values (*Laïcité et Citoyenneté*). Broad public networks, such as *Le Mouvement Associatif*, emphasize educating youth according to the principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Furthermore, Youth and Culture Centers (*Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture* – MJC) established by public associations serve as hubs

where youth receive free legal advice, access legal information, and obtain support for civic initiatives (Le Mouvement Associatif, 2022). Volunteers from NGOs hold legal debates, "Law Days," and awareness campaigns at these centers, actively combating legal nihilism.

The Nordic Model (Sweden and Finland): In Sweden and Finland, youth legal culture is anchored in principles of transparency, social equality, and early civic engagement. In Sweden, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (*LSU*) unites over 80 member organizations representing hundreds of thousands of young people (LSU, 2021). Nordic NGOs serve as primary implementers of educational programs focused on children's rights and human rights, grounding their curriculum in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2020). In Finland, the Finnish Youth Council (*Allianssi*) has established local Youth Councils (*Nuorisovaltuustot*) across municipalities. These youth councils interact directly with local authorities, participating in legislative discussions and advocating for youth interests, thereby building trust and a strong sense of responsibility toward local governance structures (Allianssi, 2022).

2. *The United States: Experiential Legal Literacy and "Street Law"*

In the United States, the involvement of non-governmental organizations in advancing youth legal culture manifests primarily through public legal education networks and civic education initiatives. Founded in 1972 at Georgetown University Law Center and later established as an independent non-profit, **Street Law, Inc.** pioneered a global model for practical legal education (Street Law, Inc., 2021).

Street Law operates in secondary schools, community centers, and juvenile justice facilities, teaching practical law necessary for daily life. Using simulation-based approaches, legal clinics, and Mock Trials/Moot Courts, the organization instructs youth on constitutional rights, consumer law, labor regulations, and criminal procedure. Similarly, organizations like the Constitutional Rights Foundation equip young citizens with tools for legislative advocacy and public oversight. Street Law is commonly used to teach practical rights and obligations; the extent to which specific programs change delinquency or institutional trust requires context-specific outcome evaluation (Arbetman & O'Brien, 2018).

3. *The United Kingdom: Youth Advocacy and Democratic Participation*

In the UK, charitable and voluntary organizations such as *Young Citizens* (formerly the Citizenship Foundation) occupy a central place in fostering legal literacy and civic responsibility (Young Citizens, 2021). Through initiative programs like *SmartLaw* and national mock trial competitions, young people engage directly with judicial processes.

Cross-case synthesis indicates that the most relevant distinction is not simply between digital and face-to-face methods but between passive exposure to legal facts and active use of legal knowledge. Simulated proceedings and debates are suited to procedural understanding and argumentation; legal clinics and advice centers connect rights to everyday problems; youth councils develop collective deliberation; and digital resources improve reach where accessible and reliable. These activities are complementary. A digital resource can support initial understanding, while trained facilitators and referral pathways remain necessary for sensitive or complicated legal questions.

A key strength of British public associations lies in training youth in legal lobbying and structured dialogue with public officials. The **UK Youth Parliament (UKYP)**—a non-governmental, democratically elected body of youth aged 11 to 18—provides a platform to debate legal and social issues. Each year, UKYP members convene in the House of Commons chamber to debate pressing issues and submit legislative recommendations to Parliament (UK Youth Parliament, 2022). This process demonstrates not only how legal norms function, but also how citizens can reform them through democratic mechanisms.

4. *East Asia: Technological Integration and Digital Legal Literacy*

In East Asian nations—notably Japan and South Korea—public associations combine traditional social values with modern technological solutions to promote legal culture. In South Korea, the **National Youth Council of Korea (NCKY)** works closely with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to implement projects enhancing digital and legal literacy among youth (NCKY, 2022).

South Korean civil society organizations actively develop mobile applications and interactive digital platforms focusing on cyberbullying prevention, copyright laws, and employment rights. Organizations like the **Korea Youth Work Agency (KYWA)** maintain digital libraries and real-time online consultation platforms that guide young workers through employment contracts, labor rights protections, and dispute resolution procedures. This digital-first approach aligns seamlessly with modern youth communication habits.

Comparative Analysis of Key Operational Mechanisms

Discussion

The findings suggest several conditions for responsible adaptation. First, experiential learning should be integrated with age-appropriate explanations of applicable law. A mock trial is educational when the roles, procedural safeguards and limits of the exercise are explicitly discussed; without such reflection, it may reproduce superficial impressions rather than legal competence. Second, legal services offered by associations must provide clear referrals to authorized professionals for matters requiring individual representation. Third, participation structures should include rural youth, students outside major cities and young people with disabilities to avoid reproducing existing inequalities. Accessible language, multiple formats and low-bandwidth materials are therefore substantive features of program quality.

Social partnership can provide facilities, coordination and financial support, but overly restrictive grants or administrative controls may weaken organizational autonomy and community trust. A balanced model should use transparent grant criteria, independent monitoring and public reporting of outputs, alongside safeguards for lawful association and expression. Assessment should distinguish indicators of activity (events, visits, participants) from indicators of learning (knowledge checks, ability to identify remedies), behavior (appropriate referrals or rights-claiming) and longer-term institutional trust. Where possible, pre- and post-program assessments or carefully chosen comparison groups would strengthen inference about effectiveness.

Digital legal education additionally raises governance questions: whether content remains current after amendments to legislation, how personal information is protected and when a chatbot should recommend human assistance. Practical minimum standards include verified authorship, update dates, easy-to-read disclaimers, privacy protection and independent channels for correcting misinformation. Because this review has no primary outcome dataset, assertions about reduced youth offending or stronger public confidence should be treated as hypotheses that require empirical testing, not established effects of the particular cases summarized here.

Synthesizing international best practices reveals that public associations elevate youth legal culture through four primary mechanisms:

1. **Non-Formal Legal Education and Interactive Methodologies:** Moving away from passive lectures, public associations leverage mock trials, debate clubs, simulation games, and interactive workshops to make complex legal structures accessible.
2. **Legal Aid Clinics and Youth Volunteerism:** University law clinics and NGO volunteer programs provide free legal advice to youth and underprivileged groups. This offers law students practical experience while instilling professional ethics and social responsibility.
3. **Digital Technologies and Media Literacy:** NGOs utilize social media, podcasts, interactive apps, and video platforms to deliver engaging, easily understandable legal content directly to youth audiences.
4. **Social Partnership and Public Outsourcing:** Advanced democracies frequently outsource components of legal education to NGOs through public grants, social contracts, and subsidies (e.g., EU *Erasmus+* programs, US *National Endowment for Democracy*). This minimizes bureaucratic overhead, optimizes public expenditure, and allows tailored, agile responses to emerging youth needs.

Despite these achievements, public associations face challenges globally, including financial volatility, project sustainability limitations, and political pressures. Nonetheless, in well-institutionalized

frameworks, these organizations remain the principal counterforce against legal nihilism and systemic delinquency.

Comprehensive conclusion and recommendations

Academic Conclusion

The comparative analysis of international experience clearly demonstrates that the legal culture of youth cannot be effectively developed through traditional, top-down state instruction alone. Public associations and non-governmental organizations function as vital intermediaries, translating abstract legal doctrines into practical, lived civic experiences. Whether through the interactive *Politische Bildung* in Germany, the pragmatic simulation models of *Street Law* in the United States, youth parliamentary advocacy in the United Kingdom, or digital legal platforms in South Korea, successful models share common traits: interactivity, accessibility, social partnership, and real youth agency in decision-making.

Enhancing youth legal culture may support responsible behavior, informed civic participation and confidence in institutions, although the magnitude and direction of such outcomes require empirical assessment. For developing legal systems, leveraging international best practices while adapting them to local cultural and constitutional realities is imperative for cultivating a generation of legally conscious, civic-minded citizens.

Practical Recommendations for Implementation:

1. **Institutionalize Interactive Legal Methodologies:** Integrate simulation-based legal education (e.g., Street Law, Model Courts, Model Parliament) into secondary and higher education curricula through formal partnerships with national NGOs.

2. **Strengthen State-NGO Social Partnerships:** Expand state funding, social contracts, and competitive grant mechanisms to support public associations offering legal literacy and legal aid projects for youth.

3. **Expand Youth Participation Platforms:** Formally integrate local and national Youth Councils into consultative legislative processes, allowing youth representatives to offer direct input on policy proposals affecting young people.

Develop Digital Legal Ecosystems: Support NGOs in creating user-friendly digital tools such as mobile apps, interactive portals, and legal advice chatbots tailored to youth legal needs (e.g., labor rights, digital rights, anti-cyberbullying).

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