

YOUTH IN EUROPE
OFFENBURG
TALKS “ ”

#5 BRIEF

IDENTITIES AND BELONGING:
WHAT DO YOUTH WORK AND
YOUTH POLICY NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?

Offenburg Reithalle
13th – 14th October, 2022

The series YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS are expert workshops on themes and phenomena relevant to the youth sector. They aim at achieving a better knowledge and understanding of youth work and youth policy in Europe and are organised by five National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth (JINT Belgium / Flanders; Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, Education and Youth Board; EDUFI Finland; JUGEND für Europa Deutschland; Movit Slovenia).

The contents of this report are based on the inputs and discussions in the workshop and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the National Agencies Erasmus+ Youth organising it.

BACKGROUND

The aim of the 5th edition of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS on 'IDENTITIES AND BELONGING: WHAT DO YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?' was to inform youth work and youth policy to better support young people in their quest of finding themselves and their 'home' in an increasing challenging and complex world. The event took place 13th & 14th September 2022 in Offenburg with 25 participants from 13 European countries representing the fields of youth work, youth policy and youth research. It was organised in various thematic sessions looking from diverse perspectives on the subjects in question with a particular focus on the role of youth work and youth policy. Regarding content, the experts discussed which identities and sense of belonging young people (seek to) have today, how these aspects are generated and which transformations they undergo. Further, the influence of individualism, solidarity and communities was explored, and which role youth (sub) cultures and youth milieux play in this process.

IN BRIEF

The discussions can be summarized as follows:

The various presentations had a quite focused approach and were not easy to bring together in a comprehensive frame. However, they offered a wide perspective and the complexity of the key notions 'identity' and 'belonging' need a good positioning from different angles, be it psychological, pedagogical, sociological, political. Some crucial aspects could not be covered in the limited time of discussions, such as the relevance of social-economic status in the identity construction of young people, the living conditions of young people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, the impact of (new/social) media, or challenges for particular groups of young people in terms of gender or sexual orientation (LGBTQ+).

It can be said that for young people today realities become more complex, so building up a stable identity or gaining a feeling of belonging demands more effort. Consistently most young people tend to choose the mainstream middle of the road type, but for many young people the sense of belonging is jeopardised by multiple conflicting identities and surroundings have a negative influence on the construction of a stable and positive identity. The role of religion, school, family and parents is a significant determinant, and the notion intersectionality offers a dimension of multiple identities at the crossroads. Youth work can offer young people a unique opportunity to experiment with identities, to create a sense of belonging. Therefore, youth work policy needs to support initiatives of young people and of youth work programmes.

The key findings in brief:

1. Today, social, economic, cultural, and political realities become more complex, so building up a stable identity or gaining a feeling of belonging demands much more effort.
2. The identified models or types of young people today sug-

gest not much of a change over the decades; the middle of the road types of young people are still the vast majority.

3. The importance of family is still by far the strongest, followed by the role of peers and friends; the trust in politics and institutions scores low, even decreasing in recent decades.
4. For young people, the sense of belonging is jeopardised by multiple conflicting identities and surroundings have a negative influence on the construction of a stable and positive identity.
5. The role of religion, school, family and parents is a significant determinant; the self-belief of young people is strongly related to the emotional ties they can develop.
6. Together with life course and intergenerational dimensions, intersectionality offers a useful notion to understand the way young people construct their identities.
7. Some young people, especially those, struggling with their identity and in search for a feeling of belonging, are vulnerable to messages of far-right networks.
8. Youth work offers young people a unique opportunity to experiment with identities, to create a sense of belonging; youth work associations can become strong actors here.
9. Youth policy at all levels needs to take the concepts of 'identity' and 'belonging' better into account, including connections to related areas such as participation, culture or inclusion.
10. Therefore, youth work policy needs to give appreciation, support, and respect for initiatives of young people and of youth work programmes by professional youth workers.

CONCLUSION

Edition #5 of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS provided deep insights from different angles, be it psychological, pedagogical, sociological, political into complex matters of identity and belonging of young people. Regarding knowledge about the subject there is much more to learn. More research and exchange are needed on how different models of activism, of youth participation, and of youth work practices affect both young people and society.

The reflections on 'IDENTITIES AND BELONGING: WHAT DO YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?' have been a variation of the previous themes and phenomena of the series YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS, having so far addressed themes like solidarity, exclusion/inclusion, populism & nationalism, (shrinking) civic spaces and civic engagement as well as environment, climate change and sustainable development and their meaning for young people, for youth work and for society at large.

