

# YOUTH IN EUROPE O F F E N B U R G T A L K S “ ”



#5

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

**R E P O R T**  
**Reithalle in Offenburg**  
**13th – 14th October 2022**

*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 for Erasmus+ Youth organising it.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The discussions 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?**’ can be summarized as follows:

The various, generally more sociological than psychological or pedagogical, 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’ became clear through the two days of introductions and discussions. Both notions need a good positioning from different angles, be it psychological, pedagogical, sociological, political. And obviously we need to speak more about intersectionality and multiple conflicting identities. It also became clear that some crucial aspects could not be covered in just two days of discussions and thus were missing, e.g. the criterion of social-economic status in a description of the identity construction of/by young people, or, the concrete living conditions of young people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, or, the impact of (new/social) media, or challenges for particular groups of young people in terms of, for example, gender or sexual orientation (LGBTQ+).

In a nutshell 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 much more effort. Consistently most young people tend to choose the mainstream middle of the road type with strong orientation to traditions and families. 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 settled 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. Together with life course and intergenerational dimensions, intersectionality provides a useful notion to understand the way young people construct their identities. Not to forget those young people who are vulnerable to messages of far-right networks and ideologies.

The role of youth work in supporting young people to effectively navigate the challenges they face have paramount importance in all discussions of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS. Youth work can offer young people a unique opportunity to experiment with identities, to create a sense of belonging. Also, youth work associations can become strong actors towards a better integration of young people in society. Therefore, youth work policy needs



to support initiatives of young people and of youth work programmes, even if the concepts of 'identity' and 'belonging' are hardly mentioned in youth policy documents of European institutions and their member states.

As in earlier editions, the reflections on identities and belonging unsurprisingly connect with previous themes and phenomena of the series YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS, their meaning for young people, for youth work, for youth policy and for society at large. Even if in terms of urgency other themes seem to be of higher priority (peace building, climate change, social inequality....), the interrelationship with these other topics is evident. Youth work must promote identity building of young people and their sense of belonging, in particular when they face conflicting and multiple identities and giving those young people a voice. Edition #5 of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS provided deep insights in these matters, derived from policy and practice and research.



## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The series YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS are expert workshops on themes and phenomena relevant to the youth sector with an impact on youth policy, youth work practice and young people's lives in general. They aim at achieving more mutual knowledge and understanding of youth work and youth policy in Europe and are organized by a steering group representing five National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition on 'IDENTITIES AND BELONGING: WHAT DO YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?'<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>.

The event took place 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022 in 'Reithalle' in Offenburg. Twenty-five participants had been invited based on their expertise and interest in the subject, coming from 13 European countries, namely Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Turkey and the UK and representing the fields of youth work, youth policy and youth research. The event<sup>4</sup> was facilitated by a moderator<sup>5</sup> and organised in various sessions: after the opening session on the first day, four thematic sessions looked from diverse perspectives on the subjects in question; in each of these sessions 30-minute presentations were followed by questions to the speakers and breakout groups that enabled participants to reflect on and debate the issues at hand. The second day was followed by another three sessions in the same format as on day one, focusing on the role of youth work and youth policy, including one panel session with youth work practitioners. Day 2 culminated and concluded in a 'harvesting session' with summary reflections by a rapporteur<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding content, the experts discussed which identities and sense of belonging young people (seek to) have today, how these aspects are generated and which transforma-

1 JINT Belgium / Flanders; Archimedes Foundation Estonia; EDUFI Finland; JUGEND für Europa Deutschland; Movit Slovenia.

2 The topics of former YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS were: "Young people and Solidarity today" (2018), "Nationalism, Populism & far-right Ideologies of young people – the role of youth work" (2019), "Shrinking spaces for youth work – Challenges for post-democratic societies" (2020, virtual) and "Environment, climate change, sustainable development – How green is youth work?" (2021)

3 There is very strong research evidence that 'location/dislocation' is a critical feature in relation to young people's sense of self and mental health; see: Rutter and Smith, *Psychosocial Disorders in Young People: Time Trends and their Causes*, Acta Sociologica Vol. 39, No. 2 (1996), pp. 237-239

4 See programme attached

5 The fifth edition was facilitated by Ajsa Hazibegovic, *Frankly Speaking*, Montenegro

6 Dr Guy Redig, former professor Youth work/youth policy, consultant culture, youth (work) & governance, Belgium

tions they undergo. Further, the influence of individualism, solidarity and communities was explored, which role youth (sub)cultures and youth milieux play in this process, and what ‘home’ in its diverse aspects means to young people today.

All relevant proceedings were recorded and published on social media (YouTube). The inputs as well as key points and results of discussions are summarized in this report<sup>7</sup>. More information can also be found in the summary of the ‘Harvesting Session’, written by Dr Guy Redig. The link to videos of all contributions can be found here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXqdbhR1bA46ww1De52D0Jg?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXqdbhR1bA46ww1De52D0Jg?view_as=subscriber)

And earlier material resulting from the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS can be found here:

[## RATIONALE FOR THE TOPIC](https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte>YouthInEurope-OffenburgTalks/</a></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

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

According to the Cambridge Dictionary<sup>8</sup> ‘Belonging’ stands for “to be in the right place or a suitable place” or “to feel happy or comfortable in a situation”. For young people it means to develop best in an environment in which they feel to belong, in homes, schools and communities, in their culture<sup>9</sup>. Belonging can particularly be linked to places: locally, regionally, nationally, or European, even globally (‘global citizen’); in times of increased mobility, however, places may play a less dominant role in young people’s life and transition regimes<sup>10</sup>. Belonging also has cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions, since it relates to communities, families, milieux, sub-cultures and social groups or classes. “Belonging is personal, infused with individual and collective histories as well as interwoven with conceptions of place... How young people negotiate belonging in everyday life and how they come to understand their positions in fragmented societies remain emerging areas....”<sup>11</sup>.

‘Identity’ is “a person’s name and other facts about who they are” or “the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others”<sup>12</sup>. It is important to withstand a definition of identity in which ‘difference’ or ‘otherness’ of an identity is something superior to

7 The report is largely based on the earlier conceptual reflections drafted by the organising team and the harvesting summary of Dr. Guy Redig; it has been critically proofread by Prof. Howard Williamson, University of South Wales

8 Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/belonging>

9 See also: Tom Hall, Howard Williamson (1999), *Citizenship and Community; Carnegie Young People Initiative Series Youth Work Press, 1999*

10 See: Johanna Wyn (2018), *A Critical Perspective on Young People and Belonging*

11 Sadia Habib, Michael Ward (ed) (2019), *Youth, Place and Theories of Belonging*

12 Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/identity>

others (as some do for instance in the ‘identitarian movement’<sup>13</sup>), but to see and analyse diverse individual and collective identities from an economic, social, cultural, and political perspective which stand in a reciprocal dependency. Social identities (such as those based on ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and religion) are always constructed within particular contexts and influenced by multiple processes of inclusion and exclusion<sup>14</sup>. During the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people make important decisions about who they are and who they hope to be in the future; that is, they form an identity<sup>15</sup>. Identity must be seen as an ever-changing process of positioning and collective (always artificial) identity be accepted as nothing once and for all.

*There are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.... There is, however, a second, related but different view of ‘cultural identity’. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’, or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’<sup>16</sup>*

As the conceptualisation of young people as a ‘homogeneous group’ doesn’t reflect both horizontal and vertical differentiations, and inequalities within society, (youth) cultures<sup>17</sup> and milieux<sup>18</sup> express better the diversity of young people and their affiliation to social classes. Besides education, jobs, income, and power as criteria for social belonging, also values, attitudes, mentalities, and principles of lifestyles are relevant elements, despite an enhanced differentiation, pluralisation, and individualisation in a post-modern world. Categories of class, ethnicity and gender are also important here, as inseparably interconnected, and standing in a mutual dependency. In the debate on youth cultures and milieux it must be acknowledged that they cannot be seen as separate, independent cultures since they develop and exist in close relationship to values and morals of other (adult) cultures<sup>19</sup>.

13 The Identitarian ‘movement’ is a pan-European nationalist, extreme far-right political ideology; see: Pam Nilan (2021), *Young People and the Far Right*. Kathrin Glösel, Natascha Strobl, Julian Bruns (2014), *Die Identitären. Handbuch zur Jugendbewegung der Neuen Rechten in Europa*. Karel Šima (2021), ‘From Identity Politics to the Identitarian Movement. The Europeanisation of Cultural Stereotypes?’ In: Jürgen Barkhoff and Joep Leerssen (ed.). *National Stereotyping, Identity Politics, European Crises*.

14 See Peter E. Hopkins (2010), *Young People, Place and Identity*

15 Berry, J. W. et al. (2006). *Immigrant youth in cultural transition. Acculturation, Identity, and adaption across national contexts*, p.8

16 Stuart Hall (1990), ‘Cultural identity and diaspora’; in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*.

17 “Youth culture refers to the cultural practice of members of this age group by which they express their identities and demonstrate their sense of belonging to a particular group of young people”; see Marlis Buchmann (2001), ‘Sociology of Youth Culture’, in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*

18 See Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (APUZ 44-45/2006), *Soziale Milieus* <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/29425/soziale-milieus>

19 See Howard Williamson and James E. Côté (2022), *Advanced Introduction to Youth Studies*, in particular the epistemological debate on realism versus nominalism (p.25)

When exploring the sense of belonging of young people, the concepts of ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ are as well relevant, while not without controversy. For some it means ‘location’, ‘anchor’, ‘foundation’, but home is often a terrible, brutal, oppressive, violent place, particular for some young people who don’t ‘fit’. ‘Home’ or ‘homeland’ is more than a place or an attitude and position; it is often perceived as one of the places where a person feels safe, and as one of the places where one likes being most. A sense of feeling at home can be seen as one of the conditions of group identity (next to difference of others). The derived notion of ‘homeland’ usually refers to one’s region of birth and the (assumed) ethnic/national affiliations and loyalties this entails. Especially for those in exile, ‘homeland’ plays a crucial role for those excluded by pushing the notion’s part linked to the location away and considering homeland as ‘non-location’: a feeling, a hope, a desire. In this regard it is also to ask, what the term ‘homeland’ means to migrants and refugees, or more general, to those excluded from their ‘homes’. Both, in historical and contemporary Europe, notions like ‘homeland’ and ‘identity’ and ‘heimat’ have been used in conservative, or even right-wing political discourses primarily. A question therefore is if the desire for ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ or even ‘identity’ is necessarily conservative, non-progressive, negative, nostalgic, and reactive, or can it as well be something that provides space for belonging, collective identities, and solidarity?

As mentioned before, young people (as individuals in general) are subject to different economic, social, cultural, and political conditions and thus create and share diverse cultures, milieux, and identities. Identities of young people develop between individualism and group belonging in diverse (sub-) cultures and milieus. Recent studies show that many young people suffer the negative impact of individualisation, and the Covid-19 pandemic additionally reveals the fragile status of mental health. Young people feel an ‘each-to-their-own’-mentality, are scared of (experienced) polarisation, hate and aggression in society and miss social cohesion. Studies also show that for a majority decent living conditions are more important than social status, economic success, and professional career; instead, mutual support, solidarity, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom are the dominating values. However, ‘young people’ are by far not a homogeneous but a very diverse group, with many nuances.

In positive terms, youth work aims at countering negative impacts and to contribute to better living conditions for young people, and “to support and defend spaces for young people’s voice and autonomy and to build bridges for young people to take the next steps, with competence and confidence, in their lives”<sup>20</sup>. In this regard the debate has to be grouped around the questions how youth work contributes to young people’s sense of belonging (in milieus as well as in neighbourhoods and local, regional, national commu-

<sup>20</sup> Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, Brussels 2015; quoted in Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention: *Signposts for the future*, Bonn, 2020; see also: Howard Williamson; ‘Winning space, building bridges – what youth work is all about’; in: Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard, Williamson (ed.) (2017) *Thinking seriously about youth work – And how to prepare people to do it.*

nities) and how it constitutes a safe space for exploring and building (positive forms of) young people's identities, including the emergence of new youth cultures and affiliations.

From a perspective of 'equal opportunities' it is of utmost relevance to ask how to make youth work inclusive to young people with non-mainstream identities, what it takes to make them feel safe and 'at home'. This also requires looking at phenomena of 'intersectionality' as 'the way in which different types of discrimination are linked to and affect each other' to understand unfair treatment because of, for example, a person's sexual orientation or ethnic background (see Cambridge Dictionary). Further it needs to be discussed in how far young people's identity development needs are reflected in (European) youth policy frameworks.

Accordingly, the key questions of 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the YOUTH in EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS in 2022 on 'Identities and belonging: what does youth work and youth policy need to know about young people today?' were:

- who are young people today? what do they think and feel and need?
- which (diverse) identities do they have (or for which they are looking for)?
- which youth (sub)cultures and milieux are relevant regarding identity building and belonging?
- what does 'home' in its diverse and contradictory aspects mean to the different groups of young people?

Informed by this closer look at young people, the core of discussions focused on the role of youth work in supporting young people, centred in the question

- how do different forms of youth work (e.g. European or local youth work, open and detached youth work, outreach work with youth and youth social work, youth councils, youth-led movements....) affect and address the development of youth identities and the sense of belonging of young people?

As in earlier editions of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS the discussions on the given topics aimed to look deeper into the described questions and phenomena, to analyse the situation more in-depth, differentiate the picture and talk also and particularly about the position and role of youth work (and policy). Participants were experts, researchers, policymakers, youth work practitioners inspired by short inputs and reflections of different kind.

## WHICH TOPICS WERE DISCUSSED & BY WHOM?

In concrete terms, the various presentations and the youth work practice panel looked at the subject of "IDENTITIES AND BELONGING: WHAT DO YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?" from diverse perspectives and touched upon a variety of thematic aspects.

The sessions in detail:

**(Sub)cultures and milieux relevant for identity building and belonging**

**Heike Möller-Slawinski**, Senior Researcher and Consultant at SINUS Institute in Heidelberg, Germany:

**'Sinus Youth Study 2020 – social / living environments of young people aged 14-17 years in Germany'**

Since 2008 SINUS-Institute explores every four years the social and living environments of young people aged 14 – 17 years in Germany and thus covers the socio-cultural diversity of young people in highly individualised societies marked by demographic shift, ageing society, a loss of normal prospects, insecure working life and non-linear CV's on the one hand and patchwork biographies on the other enhancing the pressure for self-socialisation. Surprisingly, the most recent study of 2020 shows that the majority of young people are looking optimistically towards their future, seeing a conservative, traditional, family-oriented mainstream life positive and do not wish to break out as former generations did. However, the belief in the future of Germany and the world is less optimistic. This is explained by the influence of increased problems such as the Corona pandemic, climate change, refugee 'crisis' etc.. Heike Möller-Slawinski identified seven different categories of youth orientation: conservative mainstream (homeland, nature, family), post-materialists (cosmopolitan, educated bohemians, sense for social justice), expeditives (lifestyle, success-oriented networkers), precarious (disadvantaged, biting-through mentality searching for orientation and meaningful social participation), materialistic escapists (leisure, family, brand driven consumption), experimentalists (fun, subculture, non-conformists), adaptive pragmatists (achievement and family).

***Identities from a psychological perspective***

**Sümeyra Bengisu Akkurt**, Research Assistant in Social Psychology at Abdullah Gül University, Kayseri, Turkey

**Creating and promoting strong positive identities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds**

According to social identity theory, holding positive social identities is crucial for their role in nurturing the basic human needs of self-confidence and self-compassion. When social identities begin to feel more negative than positive, or in case of multiple conflicting identities, these basic needs are not met adequately. Therefore, it is essential for young people to develop social identities that nourish and strengthen them, allowing them to feel good about themselves and use their full potential to benefit both their personal lives and society. In her input Bengisu Akkurt focused on what social psychology studies say about various stigmatized group identities, as well as multiple conflicting identities and intergroup/intersectionality dimensions. Special attention was given to the participation of disadvantaged groups in social change processes and their well-being. Finally, it was discussed what youth work and youth policy can offer young

people from disadvantaged groups in order to develop strong positive identities and demonstrate greater intergroup solidarity.

### ***Sociological reflections on identity and belonging***

**Professor Peter E. Hopkins**, Senior Lecturer in Social Geography in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University, UK

#### **Young People, Place and Identity**

Professor Hopkins focused on approaches to understanding the relationships between young people, place and identity with a specific focus on intergenerationality, intersectionality and life course. Intergenerationality is about the nature of intergenerational relations for younger people, the relationship between young people and other generations and their sense of identity with the specific generation in which they find themselves. Intersectionality is about the multiple social locations experienced by young people other than their age – here, the focus could be on race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, migration status and so on. Finally, life course offers an approach to understanding age that views younger people as occupying a location on a flexible and variable life course that connects with debates about youth transitions, emerging adulthood, and the variations with respect to when younger people reach adulthood.

### ***Migrant identities***

**Öner Kayakdemir**, Mse. Yildiz Technical University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey

#### **“Travel is a Means to an End: Home“ – a brief research on identity and belonging in relation with migration**

After a migration process from Turkey to Europe in the 1960s and following decade, in the last decade, especially after the ‘Arab Spring’, Turkey’s migration identity has shifted from being principally a country of emigration to becoming a destination for immigrants and people fleeing conflicts and wars. Obviously, the relationship between native places, identity, and one’s sense of home is becoming one of increased complexity as people migrate to further lands with significantly different cultures than the one, they are brought up in. Thus, migration creates diverse and sub-identities within people and young people are more vulnerable to this phenomenon. In his research Öner Kayakdemir analysed narratives of migrant students in Turkish universities on their perception of the concept of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ within the frame of their migration and relocation experience and shed light on how travel can also help finding a new home for young people.

### ***Authoritarian and anti-democratic ‘models’ of identity***

**Natascha Strobl**, Political Scientist, Vienna, Austria

#### **Identitarian – youth movement of the new right in Europe**

In her contribution Natascha Strobl gave some deep insights in the authoritarian concepts and strategies of the identitarian youth movement as part of the new far-right in Europe. Founded 2012 in France they exist all over Europe, from Scandinavia to Czech



Republic and Slovenia, from Italy to Austria and Germany which both can today be seen as key centres. Other than former intellectual and conservative representatives of the extreme right and their fight against democracy and the rule of law, the identitarian movement act in a pre-political space with the aim to change mindsets of young people, to gain cultural hegemony by shifting the public opinion to the far right. They build on youth, pop culture, street action, propaganda, violence and transnationalism. Europe is seen as a place of and for white people only, to be defended against all kinds of migration, otherness and a decadent lifestyle. As ideological background conspiracy and the great replacement theories are crucial, combined with subtle antisemitism and anti-globalisation rhetoric. Even if the identitarian youth movement is in decline today, new organisations and alliances pop up which offer authoritarianism as a crisis solution.

***The role of youth work in developing young people's identity and sense of belonging***

**Aidan Farrelly** and **Saoirse Reynolds**, both Lecturer in Youth Work, Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University, Ireland

**From young person to youth worker - Examining Identity and Belonging through students' perceptions and experiences, as former participants in youth work services**

Aidan Farrelly and Saoirse Reynolds presented a study which explored the complex nature of 'who we are' and 'how we come to be' by examining identity and belonging through the lens of past participants of youth work that have now decided to study it. For the study they had asked students about their perceptions and experiences as former participants in youth work services, but still actively involved in youth work either as a volunteer or paid part-time worker. They explored how students viewed youth work's role in constructing their own sense of belonging and identity and about the set of practices they now use within their youth work setting and how they link it to their own experiences and conceptions. Claims have been made regarding the benefits of young people participating in community services, with a particular focus on identity, belonging and integration. These claims were further strengthened as everyone felt that their involvement in a youth work service as a young person had contributed to their development of their identity and belonging.

***The role of youth work in practice***

**Anja Fortuna**, European Youth Forum (YFJ), Brussels, Belgium and

**Claudia Gerbaud**, IBB e.V.: Generation Europe - The Academy, Dortmund, Germany

Panel moderated by **Ajsa Hadzibegovic**, Frankly Speaking, Montenegro

Both panel participants, Anja Fortuna and Claudia Gerbaud, looked from different perspectives on the subject of identity and belonging, the perspectives of youth organisations on the one hand and of youth workers and young people on the other. Once again it was clear that in youth work practice, we cannot talk of one monolithic block of young people. Claudia Gerbaud showed how youth work with disadvantaged young people can be a means to support the building of an identity and a sense of belonging by empower-

ment and the provision of a safe space to express themselves. Listening to and learning from young people and transferring their voice to policymakers opens opportunities for participation and inclusion. Also, the empowerment of youth workers and a diversification of social and cultural backgrounds of youth workers is crucial in this regard. Anja Fortuna's perspective on young professionals and young people engaged at European level showed another reality of rather privileged young people for whom mobility experiences and social media are obviously a daily practice, also shaping their own identity building. Certainly, it remains a challenge for youth organisations to be as inclusive as possible and to speak for all young people, in particular those having no voice.

### *The role of youth policy*

**Andreas Karsten**, Director Youth Policy Labs, Berlin, Germany

#### **Identity and belonging – a topic for European Youth Policy?**

In a brief analysis of existing European manuals on youth policy Andreas Karsten observed that the essential topic of identity is conspicuous largely by its absence. Failing that, he looked deeper in national youth policies and detected the issue of identity associated with other relevant youth policy topics such as participation, human rights, inclusion, and culture. Nothing can be found, however, on conflicting identities and how to resolve them. Regarding the question in how far youth work contributes to a 'sense of belonging' it was stated that role of youth work is largely unexplored. Only youth cultures are considered being relevant in playing a specific role here. Andreas Karsten also investigated quantitative research by analysing the 'Integrated Values Surveys', published in 2022. It confirms the importance of families and friends for and a lack of interests in politics amongst young people. He concluded that we could know a lot more about youth identities if we wanted to and we could do a lot more for resolving some tensions about identity, too.

### *Harvesting session*

**Dr Guy Redig**, consultant culture, youth (work) & governance, Antwerp, Belgium

#### **Emerging insights from Day 1 & 2 - summary and reflection**

In the final session of the 'Talks' Guy Redig summarized the presentations and the discussions of the two days, which were in general more of sociological than psychological or pedagogical nature. According to him the complexity and layering of the key notions of identity and belonging became clear, while identity has a more psychological, affective and belonging a rather more social and environmental, a spatial meaning. He also identified some aspects which had not been tackled but can be considered relevant regarding identity and belonging e.g., the criterion of social-economic status in a description of the identity construction of/by young people, the concrete living conditions, geographical items such as rural/urban, or the impact of (new/social) media. In his attempt to harvest the two days Guy Redig created an own concept in which youth work can be related to both identity building and belonging by translating Putnam's theory of (local) associations as a form

of collective social capital to the reality and role of youth work. He extended Putnam's two-unit concept of every association ('bonding' and 'bridging') and added the notions of 'linking' and 'breaking'. He concluded by using this concept to situate youth work: youth work associations can become strong actors in supporting the better integration of young people in society, which is why governments should provide a sufficient youth work policy.

## SPOTLIGHTS ON RELEVANT PHENOMENA AND (POLITICAL) CHALLENGES ...

The various, generally more sociological than psychological or pedagogical, 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' became clear through the two days of introductions and discussions. Both notions need a good positioning from different angles, be it psychological, pedagogical, sociological, political. And obviously we need to speak more about intersectionality and multiple conflicting identities.

It also became clear that some crucial aspects could not be covered in just under two days of discussions and thus were missing: the criterion of social-economic status in a description of the identity construction of/by young people, or, the concrete living conditions of diverse young people, or the impact of (new/social) media, or, challenges for particular groups of young people in terms of, for example, gender or sexual orientation (LGBTQ+).

Nevertheless, this fifth edition of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALK brought some relevant results and key findings. They can be summarized as follows:

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.  
Young people must struggle harder for building a solid identity.
2. The identified models or types of young people today (conservative, post-materialist, expeditive, precarious, escapist, experimental, pragmatic) suggest 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 (although the relations have become more horizontal, less hierarchical), 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; surroundings have a negative influence on the construction of a stable and positive identity, with the sense of belonging as a nearby feeling.
5. In the analysis of these conflicting identities, 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. The notion of intersectionality offers a dimension of multiple identities at the cross-roads; young people find their way through many circuits and are constantly tantalised

to construct a new whole. 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 are vulnerable to messages blaming specific groups in society, like refugees, Muslims, non-white minority ethnic groups, LBTGQ+, etc; especially those, struggling with their identity and in search for a feeling of belonging, can be reached by far-right networks.
8. Youth work offers young people a unique opportunity to experiment with identities, to create a sense of belonging; a high motivation, enthusiasm and strong participatory reflexes and basic attitudes of youth workers are crucial in this regard.
9. Youth work associations can become strong actors towards a better integration of young people in society; 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.
10. The concepts of 'identity' and 'belonging' hardly exist in youth policy documents of European institutions and their member states, but some connections and links can be found; participation as a means to identity and belonging, culture as a cornerstone of both notions, or identity and belonging through inclusion; but nearly no indication of conflicting identities.

## CONCLUSION

Edition #5 of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS provided deep insights from different angles - 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?' were, unsurprisingly, connected to the previous themes and phenomena of the series YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS, which have, to date, addressed 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.

## ANNEX

Programme 2022



# YOUTH IN EUROPE O F F E N B U R G T A L K S “ ”



## #5

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

## PROGRAMME

2022

TIME      13<sup>th</sup> –14<sup>th</sup> September 2022

VENUE      REITHALLE OFFENBURG  
Moltkestr. 33  
77652 Offenburg  
Germany

Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2022

09:15 Welcome session **Opening**

Ajsa Hadzibegovic, facilitator, Frankly Speaking, Montenegro

**Introduction to YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS**

Claudius Siebel and Andreas Hirsch, organizing team at JUGEND  
für Europa

**Video about YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS**

**Agenda, participants, technicalities of YOUTH IN EUROPE:  
OFFENBURG TALKS #4**

Ajsa Hadzibegovic, facilitator, Frankly Speaking, Montenegro

10:00 Session #1: (Sub)cultures & milieus relevant for identity building and belonging

**Sinus Youth Study 2020 – social / living environments of young  
people aged 14 – 17 years in Germany**

Heide Möller-Slawinski, SINUS Senior Research & Consulting, Heidelberg

11:15 Coffee and Tea break

11:30 Session #2: Social identities

**Multiple conflicting identities of stigmatized and disadvantaged groups**

Bengisu Akkurt, Research Assistant in Social Psychology at  
Abdullah Gül University, Turkey

12:45 Lunch break

14:00 Session #3: Theoretical reflections on identity and belonging

**Young People, Place and Identity**

Peter E. Hopkins, Professor for Social Geography at the School of  
Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University, UK

15:15 Coffee & Tea break

15:30 Session #4: Migrant identities

**„Travel is a Means to an End : Home“ – A Research on Defining  
Identity on Migrant Youth in Higher Education in Turkey**

Öner Kaynakdemir, Mse. Yildiz Technical University, Graduate School of  
Social Sciences, Turkey

16:45 Coffee & Tea Break



17:00 Session #5: Authoritarian and anti-democratic ‘models’ of identity

**“Identitarian– youth movement of the new right in Europe”**

Natascha Strobl, Political Scientist, University of Vienna, Austria

18:15 Closing of the Day 1

Ajsa Hadzibegovic, facilitator

20:00 Dinner at Restaurant

**Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

09:15 Good morning opening session

**Introduction to the programme of the day**

Ajsa Hadzibegovic, facilitator

09:30 Session #6: The role of youth work in developing young people’s identity and sense of belonging

**How Do I, and Can We Belong? Students’ perceptions and experiences, as former participants in youth work services of the role of youth work in developing young people’s identity and sense of belonging**

Aidan Farrelly, Lecturer in Youth Work, Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University, Ireland / Saoirse Reynolds, Lecturer in Youth Work, Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University, Ireland

10:45 Coffee & tea break

11:00 Session #7: Panel: The role of youth work in practice

Moderation by Ajsa Hadzibegovic

**The perspective of Youth NGO’s**

Anja Fortuna, European Youth Forum (YFJ)

**Generation Europe - The Academy**

Claudia Gerbaud, IBB e.V. Germany

12:30 Lunch break



13:30 Session #8: The role of youth policy

**Identity and belonging - a topic for European Youth Policy?**  
Andreas Karsten, Director Youth Policy Labs, Berlin, Germany

14:45 Coffee & Tea break

15:00 Session #9: Final harvesting session

**Emerging insights from the Day 1 & 2  
– short summary by rapporteur:**

Guy Redig, consultant culture, youth (work) & governance, Belgium

**Reactions by participants**

16:00 Closing session

**Evaluation round & conclusions**

16:15 End of the meeting

*Each session consists of approx. 25-30 minutes input by speakers followed by 40-45 minutes questions & answers and reflections by participants, except opening and closing sessions, youth work practice panel and harvesting session*

