

YOUTH IN EUROPE
OFFENBURG
TALKS “ ”

#1 BRIEF

SOLIDARITY AND YOUNG
PEOPLE TODAY

27th – 28th August 2018 ZUM SALMEN, OFFENBURG

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; Archimedes Foundation Estonia; EDUFI Finland; JUGEND für Europa Deutschland; Movit Slovenia). The contents of this briefing paper 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.

BACKGROUND

The aim of the 1st YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALK was to explore the meaning and relevance of solidarity to young people in today's modern, industrialised and globalised world. Three major topics were discussed: 1. Democracy and political participation, 2. Labour and new economy, 3. European values. Some other issues relevant to the topic, such as poverty and equal opportunities, or the situation of minorities and refugees, have not been discussed in depth; they might be subject of further reflection in upcoming issues of the series. This 1st edition took place on 27th and 28th August 2018 in Salmen, Offenburg with 30 participants. They were stimulated by 30-minutes presentations of four experts who reflected on various aspects of the topic, followed by discussions in reflection groups to debate the issues at hand. Each day concluded with summary reflections by a rapporteur. The inputs as well as key points and results of discussions are also summarised in a concise report which can be found here:

<https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/YouthInEurope-OffenburgTalks/>

IN BRIEF

What does solidarity mean to young people in today's modern, industrialised and globalised world? Do young people still need and want solidarity, and if so, with and by whom (and with whom not) and how can solidarity be practised today? Young people are living in complex economic and social conditions, and facing a growing diversity in terms of cultural, ethnic and social structures, as well as tensions between individualism and self-determination on one hand, and solidarity based on a group identity and engagement for others or for a cause on the other.

It is of crucial importance for the future of democracy, the future of labour and social cohesion and, in general, the future of Europe, that the social and political challenges of today are met by interventions based on the principle of solidarity. Citizens and civil society organisations, including trade unions, have a key role to play in this respect and youth work must also take responsibility to foster solidarity among young people and their organisations.

To answer to social and political challenges of today some general interventions are necessary:

- (Re-)Activation of the welfare state – socially, culturally, politically, ethically – by a democracy that includes elements of direct to representative democracy and meets citizens' expectations.
- Citizens must uncover violations of democratic rules and norms and take to the streets to show that our societies are indivisible and that populists do not speak in the name of all people.

- The systems of “cold” or “structural” solidarity (social security) must be supplemented (not replaced!) by “warm” initiatives, mainly in the field of volunteer work and philanthropy.
- Trade Unions must be allies in civil society and democratic life and promote values of solidarity, including new forms of economy such as social enterprises, cooperatives etc.
- Civil Society Organisations and citizens' initiatives deserve active support and fair dialogue with authorities, politicians and civil servants.

What youth work needs to do and what the needs of youth work are can be summarised as follows:

- Youth work must make its underlying values, identity and goals more visible, including human and universal rights, democracy, solidarity, participation as well as advocacy and mentoring.
- Youth work is political: it should strengthen political participation, debates, deliberation and political competences, while taking a stronger and a more explicit role in this respect.
- Youth work must apply an emancipatory vision, approaching young people as co-owners of youth work and full members of society and guiding them towards autonomy and as actors of their own future.
- Youth work must be inclusive: it has to reach out to all young people coming from diverse backgrounds, with diverse interests and social statuses, paying special attention to processes of exclusion, deprivation and inequality.
- Youth work must create and defend its pedagogical environments as spaces in which there is time and place for and understanding of contradiction, doubts and discussion and in which young people can experience ‘warm’ solidarity.
- Youth work must liaise with other structures, such as human rights and civil society initiatives and join forces to protect the civic space and push back against authoritarian undemocratic trends.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, youth work cannot be neutral in this situation, and, by its nature, it isn't. And youth work cannot change the world alone, but must lead the way and explore new political, pedagogical and strategic concepts. To this end, it must apply a clear set of values and a separate ideological concept, which is much more than a mere methodology or another strand of youth work.

To achieve the above, we first need also to investigate and reflect on how active, diverse, respectful, and reflective our own organisations and individual or collective practices are and start with changing ourselves and our own worlds, and thus contribute to a systemic shift.

