

YOUTH IN EUROPE
OFFENBURG
TALKS “ ”

#2 BRIEF

NATIONALISM, POPULISM
& FAR-RIGHT IDEOLOGIES
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE
– THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK

2nd-3rd September 2019 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 2nd YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALK was to explore our understanding of nationalism, populism and far-right ideologies, to look at the impact of current trends on youth work and its existing practices and how it can approach young people affected by such ideologies, beliefs and attitudes. It was also discussed how value-based youth work can counter 'youth work' of the far-right, populist organisations, in particular in rural and deprived areas, and how specific target groups can be approached. This 2nd edition took place on 2nd and 3rd September 2019 in Salmen, Offenburg with 30 participants. They were stimulated by seven 30-minute presentations of invited experts who reflected on various aspects of the topic, followed by further discussion in reflection groups to debate the issues at hand and each day concluded with brief summary reflections by rapporteurs. Plenary presentations were recorded via video and can be followed on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXqdbhR1bA46ww1De52D0Jg?view_as=subscriber. The inputs and results of discussions are summarised in a concise report which can be found here: <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/YouthInEurope-OffenburgTalks/>

IN BRIEF

Some of the issues raised in the 2nd YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALK on nationalism, populism & far-right ideologies among young people were known and had been anticipated, but the pace and veracity with which the 'rise of the Right' has taken place across Europe, among the young too, has surprised (and shocked) policy makers and youth work experts.

Too many young people stand for right-wing political parties, for xenophobic, nationalist and authoritarian positions and movements; they are often afraid of falling through the cracks. Right-wing ideologies, populist convictions and traditionalist ethos attract young people who are questioning and often disregarding European values of democracy and pluralism and violating human rights for nationalistic and populist purposes.

It is certainly useful to distinguish different groups of young people and the role youth work plays for them:

- those 'in the middle' for whom the base line is youth work for democracy, rights and resilience,
- those more 'on the edge' for whom youth work provides an environment that allows them 'to be young together' as well as supports focused intervention and dialogue,
- those already embroiled 'in the far right' who need specialist 'second-line' response from youth work, offering exit strategies and alternative pathways.

In this situation, youth work cannot be neutral, and, by its nature, it isn't. Some potential answers as to what youth work needs to do and what the needs of youth work are, can be summarised as follows:

- Youth work must be based on democratic and social val-

ues, intercultural understanding and human rights; it has to play a central role in countering these ideologies and forms of political engagement of young people.

- Youth work can strive to change the game by building capacities of young people to deconstruct attempts of manipulation, fearmongering and distractions, and by facilitating emancipatory processes for young people and communities.
- Youth work must put the participation principle (co-ownership) in practice and encourage young people to take responsibility and be accountable, to get them organise themselves and to become co-owners of their projects by offering "space" for autonomy.
- Youth work needs to collaborate better and create alliances and purposeful partnerships with progressive and democratic forces in related social and political spheres such as social work, psychology, formal education, health and more.
- Youth work must offer sustained dialogue with young people, listen to their concerns and explore how they feel about their place and position in society and learn from them; it must reach out to all groups of young people, in particular those 'at risk'.
- Youth work must provide spaces for free and critical thinking, while promoting human rights and active citizenship and make the concerns of young people the subject of joint reflection and make them public in their communities, thus providing alternative narratives.
- Youth work must be present on a very local scale; proximity to the daily lives of children and young people is necessary to score the maximum of positive effects why local governments need to give a wide variety of youth work initiatives as much "space" as possible.
- There is especially a need for support of professional youth workers to reach 'difficult' target groups and to work with those young people at risk or even embroiled in the far right; local youth workers need coaching as well as exchange of experiences and training.
- There needs also to be a more in-depth understanding and knowledge of the threats our societies and democracies are facing in order to develop a more tuned-in and calibrated youth work response.

CONCLUSION

There are certainly limits to what youth work can achieve and it cannot save the world alone, but it does have some power and responsibility and can help

- build social norms, develop empathy, promote empowerment and emancipation,
- foster inclusion, values of active democracy, community engagement and build resilience
- offer exit strategies for young people caught up in right-wing extremism, nationalistic and xenophobic thinking.

Thus, youth work can play a modest but an important, sometimes even an exceptional role in tackling the severe threats facing our democracies if sufficient support is provided.

