

YOUTH IN EUROPE
OFFENBURG
TALKS “ ”

#4 BRIEF

ENVIRONMENT,
CLIMATE CHANGE,
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
– HOW GREEN IS YOUTH WORK?

Offenburg Reithalle
11th – 12th October, 2021

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 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.

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National Agency (Germany)
Erasmus+ Youth in Action
European Solidarity Corps



BACKGROUND

The aim of the 4th edition on 'ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – HOW GREEN IS YOUTH WORK?' was to reflect on recent political developments in our societies in relation to these topics, while also looking from a youth work and youth policy perspective. It sought to explore the relationship these topics have to youth work, what their impact has been or may be on youth work, and vice versa, and what kinds of responsibilities youth work has on these matters. The event took place on 11th and 12th October 2020 with thirty participants. Plenary presentations were live-streamed and could be followed on social media. The key points and results of discussions are summarized in a concise report and all inputs and reports are available in a reader; both can be found here, along with material resulting from earlier editions of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS: <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfel/projekte/YouthInEurope-OffenburgTalks/>. For further watching please also see the videos of all contributions https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU9YWY9nV8rBl87rUvXoG0GHrbWba_u4J

IN BRIEF

The inputs and discussions of the 4th edition on 'ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – HOW GREEN IS YOUTH WORK?' can be summarised as follows:

The effects of the human-made ecological crisis concern all of us. They have severe geopolitical consequences for the global ecosystem, for societies and economies. To counter the crisis, environmental activism has gained momentum in recent years and young people are especially playing a crucial part. A key question is the relationship of youth work to these activities and the role youth work might play as part (or not) of environmental movements and protection. In short, the key question at stake is: how green is youth work?

- A key challenge for climate activists is to attract young people from various social and cultural backgrounds in environmental issues.
- In youth work, climate justice is just one issue amongst many, though it is clearly as relevant as concerns with equalities and social justice.
- Climate (and environmental) issues are not something new to youth work but a significant feature of its practice and history.
- The efforts of youth activists in relation to climate action provide proof of an increasing participation of young people in less traditional organisational and institutional contexts.
- Through embedding climate justice within youth organisations, a model of 'empowered inclusion' can be observed.
- The diverse character of the climate movement has consolidated the political identity of youth and demanded intergenerational equity and alternatives to existing power relationships.
- Climate change has not become a universally adopted priority within the European youth sector, in policies and youth work; there is a strong probability, however, this will change.

- Within the youth policy making community, it is necessary to move from 'hesitant ambivalence' to a more determined and committed green youth work and youth policy.
- Climate change is firmly anchored within an awareness of the global dimension of an acute problem but many actions and activated young people emerge in a very local context.
- Supporting young people's perspectives and aspirations, demands by youth workers a reflective balance of both 'dutiful' and 'disruptive' action.
- Both, youth climate movement and youth work need alliances beyond and within their boundaries and to forge connections with other professional and progressive groups.
- Regarding the accountability of youth work in environmental, social and political issues its role is controversial, positioned between acting as change agent or autonomous pedagogical body.
- Youth work can play an important role in facilitating dialogue and bringing diverse stakeholders together thereby supporting youth-inclusive climate governance.
- To debate climate change it is necessary to question underlying political and economic systems, and it must be asked which alternative systems lie within the framework of debate.
- Youth work needs to answer the same question, but many youth organisations and youth work providers are integral part of the 'system' and may not be able to question it.
- Another question is how might such system change be achieved? Most of the activists count on dialogue and ongoing communication with the 'system'; what is the position of youth work?
- The climate crisis is the existential issue of our time and cannot be divorced from issues of injustice and inequality. This suggests the need for reconceptualising the world.
- Youth work needs to inform and to debate with young people about the interdependency of the natural world and about relationships with the earth, nature and living creatures.
- Such a paradigm shift will extend rights beyond humanity, one that minimises borders and boundaries in recognition of a shared world, and one which embraces inclusivity and pluralism.

CONCLUSION

The reflections on environment, climate change and sustainable development are inevitably a variation of the 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 it seems that in terms of urgency climate change is of the highest priority, and therefore arguably more paramount than the others, the interrelationship with other topics cannot be neglected. Youth work must promote awareness of global and interconnected social issues and support a plurality of voices through inclusive structures, capacity building and cross-sectoral approaches. Edition #4 of the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS provided deep insights in these matters, derived from policy and practice and research.

