

YOUTH IN EUROPE
OFFENBURG
TALKS “ ”



#4

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

CONCEPTUAL
REFLECTIONS

1. WHAT ARE THE 'YOUTH IN EUROPE OFFENBURG TALKS' ABOUT?

The series 'YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS' are expert workshops on themes relevant to the youth sector and with an impact on youth policy, youth work practice and young people's life in general. Around 30 researchers, policy makers and practitioners, who are selected in relation to their expertise on the given theme, discuss controversial issues, explore new areas and phenomena and look at answers of the youth field. Discussions are stimulated by short inputs of experts, facilitated by moderators, documented by videos and summarized by rapporteurs. The TALKS are hosted annually in Offenburg, Germany by a steering group representing five National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth¹.

2. THEME AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE 4th EDITION – SOME CONCEPTUAL REFLECTIONS

Environment, climate change and sustainable development

Environment, climate change and sustainable development concerns all of us. The effects of the human-made ecological and environmental crisis can be seen on all continents and are expected to become more and more intense, with severe consequences for the global ecosystem, our societies and economies. Increased natural disasters, armed conflicts and large-scale migration movements are a predicted result of such growing global ecological imbalance. And as the future generation, young people are especially at risk to suffer the effects.

According to Oxford Reference² the key *environmental problems* can be characterised as follows:

“Key contemporary environmental problems include the greenhouse effect and global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, and tropical forest clearance. New dimensions to the environmental crisis include emerging threats and the global nature, rapid build-up, and persistence of the problems. Whilst the problems appear to be largely physical (environmental), the causes and solutions lie much more in people's attitudes, values, and expectations. A number of factors have helped to create these problems, including developments in technology, which have given people a greater ability to use the environment and its natural resources for their own ends (particularly since the Industrial Revolution); the rapid increase in human population in recent centuries, which has significantly increased population densities in many countries and led to a significant rise in human use of natural resources; the emergence of free market economies, in

¹ JINT Belgium Flanders, Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps; EDUFI Finland; JUGEND für Europa Germany, MOVIT Slovenia;

² Oxford University Press, 2021: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oil/authority.20110803095753543> accessed 08.02.2021



which economic factors play a central role in decision-making about production, consumption, use of resources, and treatment of wastes; attitudes towards the environment, particularly amongst western cultures, which regard it as freely available for people to do whatever they like with; and the short-term time horizon over which many people, companies, and countries make decisions, which means that short-term maximization of profit has generally been taken more seriously than long-term sustainable use of the environment....”.

Climate change³ as the most visible expression of the environmental crisis includes both, global warming and the resulting large-scale shifts in weather patterns which emerged since the mid-20th century, caused by human beings who have an unprecedented impact on Earth’s climate system.

Sustainability⁴ is defined as something that can be maintained at a certain rate or level or, that can conserve an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources. According to T-Kit 13⁵ **sustainable development**

“aims to improve the quality of life of human beings, including future generations, by reconciling economic growth, social development and environmental protection”.

Environmental activism

To counter the environmental crisis and to stop the significant and accelerated climate change and its consequences from getting worse, immediate action has been taken in recent years by individuals and institutions in order to adapt to the changes and to limit the damages happening now and in the future. Environmental activism has gained momentum, which is expressed in specific activities reflecting an increasing commitment to the environment.

“Sociologically inclined scholars have conceptualised environmental activism as a collective process. Environmental activism takes place in the public sphere, in contrast to making environment-friendly decision in the private sphere which has significant environmental impact only when many people independently do the same things”⁶

As examples of such activism the ‘Glossary on Youth’ in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy includes active environmental group memberships or memberships in environmental organisations, engagement in political action, potential to influence policy or management decisions or engagement in environmental protection behaviours. Young people are playing a crucial part in this respect, particularly in recent years through the Fridays for Future and similar movements.

³ See also Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: Climate change https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_change accessed 08.02.2021

⁴ See Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>; cited from EU-CoE Youth Partnership 2018, Ellie Keen (Ed.), *Sustainability and Youth Work - T-KIT #13*

⁵ EU-CoE Youth Partnership 2018, Ellie Keen (Ed.), *Sustainability and Youth Work - T-KIT #13*
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-13-sustainability-and-youth-work>

⁶ EU-CoE Youth Partnership, *Glossary on Youth: Environmental activism* <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary>



2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and young people

Young people play a prominent and supportive role as well in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related frameworks. On this more institutional side of environmental activism at international level, the member states of the United Nations adopted in 2015 seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and addressed to all nations around the world.

“The overall aims of Agenda 2030 are to put an end to poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. A brief glance at the range of goals and the issues to be addressed confirms the broad notion of sustainability which has been adopted, extending far beyond mere environmental protection. Each of the goals contains a number of specific targets to be achieved by 2030”.⁷

The World Youth Report 2018 on “Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”⁸, prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) provides insights into the role of young people in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It underlines the importance of the 2030 Agenda in enhancing youth development efforts and explores the critical role young people have in the implementation of sustainable development efforts at all levels. The report highlights the fact that young people are far from being mere beneficiaries of the 2030 Agenda, but they have also been active architects in its development and implementation, follow-up and review.

“The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies by the target date, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration”.⁹

For the implementation of the SDGs, the international community is supposed to play an essential role in providing overall leadership, bringing the various stakeholders together, channelling international financial support, and providing technical assistance. But real solutions to the existing challenges facing youth have to be dealt with significantly at local level, at home, which is why governments should support youth initiatives at the grass-roots and national levels.

“Critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda are the role of young people in engaging with local and national government in delivering on policies and

⁷ EU-CoE Youth Partnership 2018, Ellie Keen (Ed.), *Sustainability and Youth Work - T-KIT #13*

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-13-sustainability-and-youth-work>

⁸ <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789213632567>

⁹ *ibidem*

¹⁰ *ibidem*



programmes on the ground; the role of public-private partnerships in driving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including financing and harnessing technology for data collection and utilization; and the role of youth participation in informing equitable and diverse policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation”.¹⁰

The Youth Goals

The topic ‘environment, climate change and sustainable development’ also plays an ever-increasing role in European youth work. In 2018, around 50,000 young people took part in a Europe-wide survey which led to 11 Youth Goals with concrete sub-goals. These European Youth Goals summarise the issues that affect young people in Europe, the political priorities that are important to them and identify in which areas change still has to happen so that young people in Europe can use their full potential.

Goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe asks to

*“achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives” and states “that nowadays we consume in a way that our environment can’t handle. Society needs to act against climate change and the growing environmental threats. But our society cannot solve a problem that it is not willing to acknowledge. That is why everyone including young people has to start taking responsibility for their actions, and impact on the life of future generations. Becoming sustainable is not a choice, it is an obligation.”*¹¹

As concrete aims goal #10 claims to

- *“ensure everyone including young people knows the effect of their actions on the environment,*
- *empower the entire society especially young people to act as agents of change for environmental and sustainable development,*
- *take into account the environmental impact of every policy and life decision while ensuring that young people are included in sustainable development policy-making on all levels,*
- *increase international cooperation to eliminate environmentally harmful production and consumption,*
- *support and strengthen opportunities for young people to volunteer in the environmental sector,*
- *ensure everyone especially young people have access to eco-friendly infrastructure for living a more sustainable lifestyle and*
- *expand research and innovation into eco-friendly solutions and technologies”*.¹²

¹⁰ *ibidem*

¹¹ <https://youth-goals.eu/youthgoals>

¹² *ibidem*



The 3rd European Youth Work Convention and environment, climate change and sustainable development

Most recently, environment, climate change and sustainable development has also been a topic of discussion in the 3rd European Youth Work Convention; in its final declaration *'Signposts for the future'*¹³ the social situation of young people in Europe is analysed as follows:

"...constant changes and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic [which] have indicated forcefully that the future is not what it used to be - what was foreseen in the past, in health, economy, environment and technology, is no longer credible or perhaps even possible."

Besides a rise of anti-democratic tendencies, shrinking spaces for civil society, violations of human rights, disappearance of trust in public authorities,

*"all this is taking place within a climate crisis of which young people are acutely aware, which undoubtedly endangers social cohesion and diminishes the quality of life and a digital realm that is becoming overwhelmingly present"*¹⁴.

According to the declaration,

*"it is young people... who ... display creativity and imagination, and demonstrate resilience, when facing uncertainties and disruption in their lives... Those 'active' and 'empowered' young people who do articulate their needs, perspectives and convictions are, too often, overlooked or ignored by the societies and communities in which they live. However, many [other] young people are still denied their rights or remain unaware of them and, as a result, are unable to express their views and voice effectively"*¹⁵.

The declaration highlights with regard to environmental issues, climate change and sustainable development the following items:

- A growing youth work provision throughout Europe must seek cross-sectoral cooperation and connection and build links with other domains in the public and private spheres and provide a pathway to guide and include new initiatives of young people.
- European funding programmes from both the European Union and the Council of Europe should also have the ambition to strengthen the cross-sectoral approach and mainstream youth work priorities in overall European funding.
- There should be a fostering of a culture of innovation in the practice and a practice of innovation in youth work by making youth work greener, encourage and prioritise practices and solutions that are environmentally friendly, aligned with the principles of sustainable development that youth work seeks to instil and young people expect.
- It is crucial to strengthen the capacity of youth work to navigate European and world-wide transformations by fostering in youth work practice a societal and global challenges dimension and developing practices and strategies for

¹³ <https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/convention/final-declaration/>

¹⁴ *ibidem*

¹⁵ *ibidem*



youth work to enable young people to engage in a democratic society and enable them to bring change on topics that they are already vocal about and interested in (such as the movements connected to climate change, racial discrimination or reproductive health).

3. FOCUS OF AND QUESTIONS FOR 'YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS'

Looking from a youth work and youth policy perspective to the before mentioned items it must be discussed, which relationship these topics have to youth work, what their impact on youth work (and vice versa) is and which responsibility youth work has, or better: which role youth work can play in being part (or not) of environmental movements and protection. It reaches from non-formal and informal environmental learning, (green) mobility within and outside youth work to the relationship between rural and urban areas, (green) food production & consumption, environmental behaviour, intergenerational relationships, to name a few subjects; also, historical dimensions in the history of youth work could be explored, e.g. *Wandervögel* and the 'back to nature movements'.

Some concrete questions addressed to youth work and youth policy should help to reflect in the YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS on the following items (on a non-exhaustive list):

- which complex of challenges in regards to environmental issues, climate change and sustainable development are informing young people's growing concern and activism in those fields?
- which conceptual frameworks on the relation between youth work and the topics at hand do exist, what are different theoretical/disciplinary perspectives, core concepts etc.?
- what is the scientific, evidence-based state of the art regarding youth work and youth responses to these issues?
- how environmental issues, climate change and sustainable development can be made a subject of youth work and non-formal learning, which approaches, strategies, tools, exist?
- how (cross-sectoral) cooperation with environmental initiatives and policies can be fostered and how a link to new environmental movements can be made by youth work?
- how can European and other (national) programmes be used to engage in environmental issues, especially the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes?
- how youth work can be made greener and environmentally friendly, in particular with regard to international mobility programmes?
- how can the UN Sustainable Development Goals be supported by non-formal and informal learning and other initiatives?
- which relationship does exist between the Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights Education?



- how can youth workers and Youth NGOs act as facilitators of processes on environmental issues between young people & society / policy-makers?
- how can young people claim spaces for participation in respective policy areas and strike for acceptance of results of participation processes by adults?
- How can international (environmental) justice or broader, intergenerational solidarity be promoted by young people and through youth work?
- which implications does the Corona / COVID-19 crisis have for youth work in particular when the virus is considered a result of environmental degradation?

4. DATE AND PLACE OF 'YOUTH IN EUROPE: OFFENBURG TALKS'

The 4th edition of the 'TALKS' will take place on **Monday, 11th – Tuesday, 12th October 2021** in Offenburg, Germany. The meeting will start at 10h00 on the first day and end in the afternoon at 16h00 of the second day. In case the pandemic-related situation shall not allow an in-person meeting, the event will take place virtually or in a hybrid format.

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