



## Speak UP, Step UP!

### European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship

European Conference  
16 to 18 October 2017, Berlin

- \* JUGEND für Europa, in cooperation with SALTO SEE and Erasmus+ Youth in Action National Agencies, invites you to a European conference that will consider the practice, impact and future role of Erasmus+ Youth in Action in promoting democratic values and attitudes and active citizenship among young people in Europe.

### \* **Background**

Over the last decade Europe has experienced unprecedented political challenges: an economic and financial crisis that has disproportionately negatively impacted on Europe's young people, the threat of violent extremism, terrorist attacks, growing intolerance, racism and xenophobia, the proliferation of on- and offline hate speech, and backtracking on democratic values. Whether as victims, perpetrators, bystanders or activists, young people all over Europe are concerned about, but also directly affected by, these phenomena. Politicians, researchers and educators all over Europe are asking questions about why and how young Europeans are becoming radicalized and engaging in violent extremism, why the majority of millennials claim to be interested in politics and socially engaged, but do not go to vote and why in some parts of Europe populists are more convincing to youth than mainstream parties.

For more than 30 years, the European youth and mobility programmes have promoted European values in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, and especially participation in democratic



life, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity among young people around Europe and beyond. Since their very beginnings, these programmes have provided young people with opportunities to work on issues of political and social importance, in an effort to engage them as makers of the changes they want to see in their local communities, national societies and Europe.

However, and although the civic and political engagement of young people has always been a priority for Erasmus+ Youth in Action, and there is much to be proud of in regard of the role of Erasmus+ Youth in Action for young people's active citizenship, the idea that European and international youth work could and should have explicitly political aims is not universally accepted. Members of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action community of practice daily grapple with the challenge of implementing a coherent and effective political dimension in their projects with and by young people.

Statements such as the Paris Declaration show the extent to which there is growing concern among political decision makers at the highest level regarding the direction of democratic development in both the European Union and individual societies in Europe, and regarding the role young people have in those developments. As a statement of the Ministers of Education of all EU Member States, the Paris Declaration emphasizes concrete political aims and objectives for Erasmus+ and Youth in Action, such as:

- Ensuring young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to discrimination and indoctrination;
- Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;

- Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

The time seems ripe to dive deeper into the role and impact of European and international youth work and to try to understand how (specifically through which practices and with which results) Erasmus+ Youth in Action is contributing to the formation of young people's democratic values, active citizenship, political literacy and social agency. Does it really deliver on the expectations of European political decision makers in relation to political objectives, as enshrined in the Paris Declaration among other key documents? If so, what kind of educational work with young people is proving most effective for such objectives? Which are the policy and quality development processes that are addressing this theme? Do they need to be linked up? And what would be needed to ensure that the political dimension of European and international youth work is able to flourish within Erasmus+ Youth in Action and other programmes that are offering support?

## **Aim of the conference**

To reinforce the role and impact of Erasmus+ Youth in Action in the promotion of active citizenship and common European values including pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality, in view of the aims of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and those expressed in the Paris Declaration.

## **Objectives of the conference**

- to explore, document and celebrate the diversity of practices of political education and critical pedagogy that can be found in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme, and which provide young people with the opportunity to work on values (e.g. freedom, tolerance and anti-discrimination) and on social/political change-making;

- to gather evidence for how youth work practice in the programme is responding to the political and social challenges of European societies that young people themselves consider important;
- to problematize and debate the challenges and dilemmas that arise in implementing the value-oriented objectives of the programme and in the practice of value-based European and international youth work;
- to consider the relevance of the history of the European youth programmes and of the educational traditions out of which they developed for the future practice of international youth work, critical pedagogy and intercultural political education in Erasmus+ Youth in Action;
- to identify gaps that could be filled, measures to meet needs, opportunities for cooperation and recommendations for future action, that could support and further effective engagement of Erasmus+ Youth in Action with the political and social challenges of European societies;
- to link the different policy and practice processes where these issues are being addressed, debated, developed and decided upon so as to ensure effective integration of initiatives concerned with similar aims.

## **Expected outcomes of the conference**

It is hoped that the conference will be an occasion for members of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action community of practice around Europe to revisit and re-affirm their shared vision for the political and civic purpose of the programme, taking into account latest information about the attitudes and concerns of young people in Europe, and about the actual practice of civic education taking place in the programme. It is further expected that the conference will give

impetus to European processes that are concerned with these issues, and encourage more integration between the debates taking place in these respective processes.

## Participants of the conference

The conference will welcome up to 100 participants from all over Europe. This conference is for you, if you correspond to one or more of the following profiles:

- you are currently implementing or have previously implemented Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects (any action) that seek to address contemporary political and social challenges with young people;
- you work directly with young people in projects or manage projects through which you have extensive contact with young people;
- you (have) actively use(d) different non-formal education approaches (for example, critical pedagogy, education for democratic citizenship, European citizenship education, human rights education, political or intercultural education) or youth work approaches (open youth work, participatory / youth led youth work, etc.) in your Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects;
- you are using (or have used) Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects to develop young people's active citizenship, political literacy and social action;
- you are managing an organization, association, institution or network that is actively promoting values underpinning young people's active citizenship using political or value based education in the European youth field;
- you are responsible for the development and implementation of policy frameworks that support civic and political education (for example, youth policy, research, recognition of non- and informal education and youth work, quality standards in the training of professionals delivering educational programmes, National Agencies etc.).

All participants should be in a position to share their specific experiences of working with and on the development of international youth work, using Erasmus+/Youth in Action and / or other European youth programmes. Participants should be working in positions of responsibility in their organizations. However, they may be professionals, volunteers, employees or representatives of their organizations.

The organizers will attempt to compose a group of participants that is representative of the widest possible diversity of perspectives and experiences from across the European youth field, in particular the Erasmus+/Youth in Action programme. Social and/or cultural groups under-represented in the Erasmus+/Youth in Action programme. Gender and geography will also be considered in composing the conference participant group.

## Venue

Derag Livinghotel Weißensee  
Parkstraße 87  
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