

Youth (& Youth Work) in Europe – Participation and Citizenship in and after COVID-Times

Yael Ohana

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Who's talking?

- Yael Ohana
- 20+ years involvement in the European youth sector
- Previous lives as a volunteer in a youth organisation, a youth worker, an educational advisor at the EYCs, expert consultant in political intercultural education and youth policy
- Since January 2019 at the Open Society Foundations in Berlin
- A sceptical view on the European dimension
- Find out more: www.frankly-speaking.org

Some remarks to relativize

Both ideas – ‘youth’ and ‘youth work’ are very big

- Neither are monolithic nor unified.
- Both highly diverse between but also inside countries and across Europe.
- Young people, their organisations and youth work have all been affected and are all responding to this new crisis.

Pandemic generation (lost)?

- The situation of young people around Europe and the world has become more precarious as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic – obvious and less obvious
- The reality of a growing proportion of young people is that of the 'disrupted transition' and of serious disorientation: interrupted education, poor employment prospects, negative psycho-social effects of forced isolation, reduced access to resources and (social) support infrastructure under pressure
- The Pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of most at risk young people further, and it has worsened the chances for policy provisions to reach and support them

... young people are less at-risk in terms of developing severe physical health symptoms linked to COVID-19 than older age cohorts (WHO, 2020[6]). However, the disruption in their access to education and employment opportunities as a result of economic downturn is likely to put the young generation on a much more volatile trajectory in finding and maintaining quality jobs and income.

A useful definition of youth work is contained in the [Council of Europe, Youth Work Portfolio](#)

*‘Youth work is a tool for **personal development, social integration and active citizenship** of young people ...*

*The main objective of youth work is to **create opportunities for young people to shape their own futures ...**’*

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK FOR?

ENABLING

young people to do the things they want to do together and individually

Providing young people with opportunities to **EMANCIPATE** and gain autonomy

Providing young people with healthy and safe opportunities for leisure that they can **ENJOY**



EMPOWERING

young people to change things they think need to be changed in their immediate surroundings and society

Helping young people to **ENGAGE** with power and policy

Providing young people with relevant and engaging non-formal **EDUCATION** opportunities that improve their competencies

Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio>



Policy Brief

09/2020

Written by
Johanna Böhler
Andreas Karsten
Ashley Pitschmann

YOUTH WORK AND THE CORONA PANDEMIC IN EUROPE

RAY-COR

Key findings
First online survey and initial review of literature



- Although youth work is experimenting and adapting to respond fast to the needs of young people in the Pandemic
- Youth work spaces, formats, methods and everything else have changed ...
- Budgets allocations, private funding, paid work, sources of income and volunteering time have been cut significantly
- Youth work is having a hard time reaching marginalized young people, even with enhanced digital tools & approaches

Major concern 1: Social Distancing

- For many young people across Europe, the local youth center and the youth work activities of NGOs and charities are a lifeboat and an escape from daily dangers. Social distancing means that many of these activities are suspended and young people in such situations are locked in with no alternatives.
- The face-to-face interaction and encounters, living and working together, the collective dimension of youth work, are CENTRAL its DNA. The fact that relationship building, the development of collective identities and collective action, when young people DO NOT MEET?

Major concern 2: Digital readiness and divide

- Youth work institutions and providers are still a long way from having the necessary technological coverage, concepts and practices for delivering youth work pedagogy online.

Major concern 3: Young people's exclusion from decision making about Pandemic measures

- Young people's possibilities for participation in decision-making around the Pandemic response in regard of youth specific issues are limited if existent at all
- The general closing of the civic space observed over the last years across Europe (also for youth civil society) has escalated, with some governments using the Pandemic emergency measures as a ruse to pursue authoritarian agendas
- Young people, youth movements/organisations and youth work organisations have raised their concerns loudly in the crisis and understand the pressing need for policy advocacy

Youth work needs more support

- The discourse on 'intergenerational solidarity' has largely been a 1-way street (young people are spreading the virus with their irresponsible behaviour)
- The demands on youth work to adapt fast and to deliver in the emergency have been fulfilled – not much has come back

Youth work at an impasse?

- Understand that service provision can become a trap.
- Understand that digital cannot address all the consequences of social distancing for youth work, and new and alternative approaches to youth work delivery will need to be developed to compensate for these.
- Accept that there is a political dimension to this discussion that relates to emancipation, participation and democracy.
- Accept that to remain relevant to young people youth work needs to develop a clear, actionable position on climate and sustainability

The smartest way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion but allow very lively debate within that spectrum.

– *Noam Chomsky, the Common Good*