

Reach YOUTH

IO2 F2F / ONLINE TRAININGS CURRICULUM

ERASMUS+ KA2 - COOPERATION FOR INNOVATION AND THE EXCHANGE
OF
GOOD PRACTICES - STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING
PROJECT N° 2019-1-DE02-KA202-006171



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1. REACH YOUTH- INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT IDEA

Youth social work shows that unestablished and in many cases, somehow disadvantaged young people tend to listen to anti-democratic groups and are influenced by populist tendencies. In all cases of radicalization tendencies, it is relevant to reach these young adults if we want to win them over to democratic action and thinking.

It is the task of youth social work throughout Europe to counteract these problems. Therefore, the aim of the project Reach YOUth is to identify the most effective intervention instruments for anti-democratic tendencies in the partner countries and to bring them together in a training set. This "Democracy Intervention Set" is to be used throughout Europe and will enable professionals in youth social work to use a new, activating and interculturally designed training set in their work.

This working paper describes the curriculum for this F2F training of the Erasmus+ -project Reach YOUth. Together with the very well worked out IO3 of this Reach YOUth project it is intended to be a helpful guideline for addressing and promoting democratic thinking and acting with young people and for counteracting any forms of unsolidaristic, anti-democratic or radical thinking and acting.

The curriculum is about comments on the importance and necessity of democracy education in social work with adolescents and young adults, fundamental considerations and explanations of the underlying human image and pedagogical approach as well as the elaboration of ethical guidelines and necessary core competencies of the Reach YOUth trainers. The role of trainers and social workers who disseminate the Reach YOUth project among colleagues and work with young people using the Reach YOUth exercises and methods and considerations on the piloting of the interventions as well as further development of individual interventions and the entire intervention set follow these fundamental themes.

The intervention descriptions will be described in detail in another second document, as a collection or so called our Democracy- Intervention- Set, which will be introduced in the paragraph about the Curriculum.

The target group of the Reach YOUth intervention set are disadvantaged young people. They should be motivated to consciously experience their self-efficacy and to deal with democratic values.

The target groups of the Reach YOUth project are:

PRIMARY TARGET GROUP

- 1) Professionals in youth social work who work with disadvantaged young people.
- 2) Decision-makers in youth social work, vocational training providers and universities of applied sciences in the social sector.

INDIRECT TARGET GROUP

- 1) Disadvantaged young people who are influenced by anti-democratic, populist and radicalizing tendencies and who are insufficiently reached by existing methods.
- 2) Education policy decision makers who are responsible for the implementation of vocational training (VET) or initial social education (HE sectors - universities of applied sciences/universities).

2. IO2 CURRICULUM

The target groups of this curriculum are professionals in youth welfare/youth social work who work with disadvantaged young people in order to support their ability to make decisions and self-reflection.

It is written for these social workers, pedagogues and professionals, who have come to know and appreciate the Reach YOUth approach and who want to train other professionals in the Reach YOUth approach through their own experiences as a participant and also as a trainer who has carried out the interventions with groups and feels confident in dealing with them.

These multipliers of the Reach YOUth approach; we will call them trainer, will be able to present the topic of democracy and Europe in an easily understandable and attractive way, so that even young adults who are tired of politics become interested in it. They should be picked up in their own world and be given an overview of the political system. Furthermore, in the course of the training, they should gain an understanding of how their own values, fears or hopes are reflected in political attitudes. The aim is for the young adults to reflect on themselves in dialogue with the trainer and other peers.

In summary, it can be said that the hoped-for effect is prevention and reduction of radicalised and populist attitudes and ways of thinking. After the democracy training, trainers as well as young adults will have sharpened the connection between their own values, actions and social effects. This in turn will enable them to be vigilant in their own environment against influence and manipulation.

This curriculum works as follows:

The curriculum will be piloted and evaluated in the own organisation as well as at the Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences (associated partner of the project) with students in the field of social services; with professionals from youth welfare offices, from institutions of open youth welfare and counselling centres of youth social work, school social workers.

A collection of feedback from trials with the secondary target group of disadvantaged young people will follow. After feedback and evaluation of the pilot phase, the curriculum will be adapted and optimised. A continuous improvement process is implemented as a fundamental component of the development work.

You will read a range of information around the Reach YOUth project theme to gain a basic understanding. These topics will be addressed through different interventions, which you can find in an attached collection. There you will find the objectives and tackled areas of the interventions mentioned in the curriculum. The interventions cover 8 thematic areas, which we call objectives. You can find them at point 4 and 5 more detailed (- p. 9-10f.)

This separate collection of the interventions serves to facilitate applicability, otherwise it would be difficult to keep track within a file. This collection of interventions is in principle the practical manual to the theoretical curriculum!

The structure of this paper:

- The development of the curriculum starts with a chapter about the importance and necessity of democracy education, followed by the definition of learning objectives.
- The choice of the intervention set will be explained and there will be a further development of interventions and compilation as a set of instruments in the curriculum.
- The underlying pedagogical approach and the role of the Reach YOUth trainer will be thematised in detail because this is crucial for the successful application of the Reach YOUth Democracy - Intervention - Set.
- A development of a competence profile with absolutely necessary skills for professionals, as no basic trainer knowledge is taught in the training. Trainer skills and also ethical guidelines will be thematised at the end of this worksheet.

3. IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF DEMOCRACY EDUCATION

The following summarised text from the Italian partners CESIE refers to the themes and understanding of democracy, anti-democratic tendencies, populism and radicalization process. At the end of the curriculum you will find the unabridged text with literature and references and considerations about also far-right and Islamic extremism.

This chapter could be seen as a quick introduction on why our interventions and F2F trainings are important for youth workers and for young people who will benefit from them. The aim is portraying the importance of youth work in contributing to young people democratic value uptake as well as preventing young people involvement into radicalization processes and extremist groups.

(...) Young people seek for understanding, inclusion and sense of belonging to a community. They tend to get emotional and heat up quickly for the things they care about and they tend to have romanticized views on reality, politics and ideology. Moreover, young people have it increasingly harder to find their place in society and at the same time meet the expectation of society. Loneliness, depression and mental health illnesses are at a record high among young people in Europe.

Youth workers and practitioners alike are in a place of great importance to prevent young people's radicalization process and help them understand the importance of democracy and its core values in order to live in a peaceful society where there is room for everyone and their grievances are dealt with through democratic action.

3.1 The importance of Democratic values

A democratic society is safe from political violence and authoritarian regimes if democratic values are upheld by society. The willingness of citizens to commit to democratic institution, procedures and behaviours is proportional to the success of such institution and procedures in determining a democratic society. When this dual bond is broken, institutions could act less democratically and citizens could start adopting undemocratic tendencies to the detriment of European peaceful, equal and inclusive societies.

3.2 Democracy

Democracy is complex and although the majority of European countries nowadays has a democratic constitution, this has not always been the way things went. On a constitutional sense, democracy means that the power belongs to the people, who then, through democratic election, delegate their representatives to decide over the upcoming future of the country, its standing in international politics and geopolitical issues, how to deal with societal change and the way to go ahead with key part of what can be defined the collective well-being of the population (including economy, welfare, education, healthcare, labour market and its regulation, leisure activities, environment and so forth). Democracy is based on the principle that no one has the right to impose worldviews, ideologies and laws over the population.

3.3 Constitutions and its safeguards

By being a representative democracy, it must make sure that even if after the election the majority has the power to rule, it does so by respecting all the minorities who have lost the elections. In order to guarantee that the ruling parties do not modify the law in a discriminatory or harassing way towards minorities, most democratic countries have constitutional provisions. These include the provisions regarding human rights, political and civil rights and anti-discriminatory policies. In a democracy, all citizens have the same right to vote and participate to the public life regardless their gender, religious affiliation, political standing (unless the political standing is illegal as the case of Fascism in Italy), sexual orientation and wealth and social status, language spoken and ethnicity. A democratic state, to be called one, must have universal values and principles that must always be there in the democratic process. These values are:

- Freedom: This means both individually and collectively, citizens are free to express themselves and choose for themselves as long as this remains within the boundaries set by the law.
- Dialogue: As opposed to conflict (violent and verbal) a democracy seeks continuously to find the common point between political adversaries through dialogue and dialectic.
- Equality: As mentioned before, in a democracy all citizens are equal both as individuals and as members of collective groups.
- Pluralism: Meaning that democratic countries accept and embrace and value diversity both at societal and political level.
- Justice: All people must be treated fairly and equally; all human rights must be guaranteed to each and every citizen of the given democracy.

3.4 Main challenges to democracy

Nowadays, democracies all around the world face problems due to a spike in antidemocratic tendencies among the population. Even though humanity is experiencing an unprecedented level of prosperity and safety, the internal political debate of many democracies has become way more polarized and the public opinion support towards democracy is slowly winding down. This process has several interlocked root causes; however, its symptoms are widespread across most European countries. It is easy to spot the effect of this crisis of democracy if one takes a look at the raising of far-Right and populist political groups all over Europe.

The growing discontent towards the economy and the perception of inequality in many areas of society (unemployment, salaries, gender-related issues, racial discrimination, etc.), are a driving factor as far as the rising of these anti-democratic sentiments is concerned.

3.5 Populism

Populism is defined as the tendency of political leaders to appeal to the “common folks” by portraying their interests as violated by a corrupt elite which encompasses all existing political parties. On an ideological level populism often mixes up left-wing and right-wing ideas and solutions. Often populist leaders take up a nationalistic tone blaming other countries or minorities as those responsible for the problem the country is facing. These political recipes often are spiced up with some degrees of racism, conspiracy mongering and other dangerous undemocratic ideas which aims at concentrating more and more power in the hand of a charismatic leader. Populism is always dangerous because it undermines the democratic procedures and values of a society ultimately leading bad leadership, inconsistent policy making and even dictatorship-like power setting. The extent to which a populist movement gain power over democratic institutions depends on the strengths of populist movements as well as the maturity and dept of democratic values in a given society. Mature democracy can deal with populist leaders better than “young” democracies.

3.6 Propaganda

Propaganda has a huge impact on the existence and spreading of dangerous extremist narratives as well as contributing to the radicalization process of individuals as well as putting them in contact with extremist groups.

According to the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN, 2019), Propaganda is “the strategic communication of ideas, aimed at manipulating specific target audiences for an extremist cause”. This means that the whole message and communication of extremist groups is oriented towards a target (category of people they have identified as those who would most likely be impacted by their message). But this also means that the feeling and emotions the target of the message will have to feel are set up to buy its heart to the cause.

3.7 Fake news

Fake news and conspiracy theories started to be a thing back in the early 1950s. Back then they mostly were fun made-up facts never actually happened and designed to strike a laugh out of people. Aside than the innocent fun ones though, fake news can be extremely dangerous tools for extremist groups or populist leaders to direct hate and anger against specific groups and/or recruit new supporters.

Populist groups started seeing the propaganda potential of these fake news and started developing and spreading fake news to emphasize how corrupt the elites are and how important it is for “the people” to take back control of the institution against the “establishment”.

3.8 Polarization

Political polarization is defined as the widening of the spectrum of acceptable political opinion towards the extremes (far-right and far-left). The end of the process of polarization is the “us vs. them”. This thought construct does not allow one people identifying themselves with one of the two parties to understand the other party as legitimate therefore increasing dangerous and undemocratic behaviours such as hate speech, violence (verbal and physical), intolerance and deliberate attacks on the counterpart rights and communities.

3.9 Extremism

Extremism is understood as the uptake of extreme political and identity-based views which tend to be based on the logic of the in-group vs. out-group. The in-group is the group in which the individual identifies themselves with. An individual who believes in extremist views on society is more likely to fall trapped into violent extremist political groups ultimately putting himself/herself and others at risk. Extremist groups such as Neo-Nazi, Neo-fascist and Jihadists groups are always looking out for new recruits among those most vulnerable to extremist world views, playing with their vulnerability to radicalize them.

3.10 Radicalization

Radicalization is a process defined by Berger as “Radicalisation is the [...] adoption of increasingly negative ideas about an out-group and increasing harsh action against the out-group that are justifiable. This means that a person who does not like a particular group of people but would not actively hate them is not yet radicalized. Radicalization is the slow poisoning of one’s feelings against the out-group and the growing perceived threat from the outgroup. This leads to the increase of readiness of the radicalized person to commit aggressive acts against the out-group as well as falling in the trap of extremist groups.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES AND AIMS OF THE CURRICULUM

The main aims of this curriculum are:

- to communicate the basic idea of the Reach YOUTH approach: The political background and the importance and necessity of democracy education, the fundamental, the pedagogical approach, the competence profile with the role and skills of the trainers and ethical guidelines.
- to get to know the Reach YOUTH intervention set in practice and to get to know all interventions as a participant and try out also as many interventions as possible as a trainer.

In order to apply the individual Reach YOUTH interventions in practice, it is necessary to try out the active role as a participant and advisable also as a trainer at least once before.

It is highly recommended to have experienced the interventions in both roles in order to get the necessary confidence with the procedure and the possible impact.

| LEARNING OUTCOMES Reach YOUTH IO2 | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge | Reach YOUTH trainers know how <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to name the background, importance, benefits and the goal of the Reach YOUTH project • to name and describe the ‘Reach YOUTH methodology’ with the main idea, fundamental approach, ethical guidelines, interventions • to name and describe the single interventions and their impact and to name the possibilities of adaptations of the Reach YOUTH interventions |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Skills | Reach YOUth trainers are able to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a trustful, structured and protected framework. • carry out and moderate the different interventions accordingly to the underlying approach and the ethical guidelines. • to work independently with the target group and the group: Communicating the Reach YOUth approach to participants and network partners. |
| Competences | Reach YOUth trainers have the competence to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a trustful, structured and protected framework. • prepare independently and structure the interventions Process' in order to guide participants through this process professionally. • initiate actively multiplier events and workshops with other practitioners/colleagues/trainers to disseminate the project. • Initiate actively group settings with colleagues in order exchange experiences and inform each other about results and to become very familiar with all interventions, to reflect and further develop the approach. |

5. REACH YOUTH DEMOCRACY- INTERVENTION- SET

The selection of suitable methods and interventions basically bases on the objectives defined in the project's "Interlectual Outcome 2" (IO 2).

In the following, the interventions presented in the Democracy- Intervention-Set will now be briefly explained. These short summaries are meant to be an inspiration for you and give you an idea of how the interventions are designed or what quintessence they harbour. The different methods were carefully piloted by all partners of the consortium, modified and also given free space for new adaptations or changes. The trainers were given specifics, variations and hints. this intervention set has exactly this important advantage that individual changes can be made depending on the target group and the focus of the topic. The intervention set is not rigid and creates room for diversity. In this document you can read a general introduction to the topics around democracy, discrimination, radicalization etc. In the second document, the actual tool for action, the interventions are described in detail with all their additional materials. Both documents are to be understood and used as a unit. While this document provides the theoretical background, the second document aims at practical application.

The table below gives an overview of which objectives are covered by which interventions. The table also provides guidance to the users of the "Democracy-Intervention-Set" in selecting appropriate interventions for their target group or for a specific topic.

Overview: All best practice methods selected by partner consortium

| Methods / Interventions | Objectives according to IO 2 | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Hiding place Simulation | | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Drawing a Concept / the Animal of Democracy | x | x | | | | x | | |
| We are the world | x | | x | | | x | | |
| Structured Democratic Dialogue Process | | x | x | x | | | x | |
| Decentration through images | | | x | x | x | | | |
| Model United Nations (MUN) | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| One Step Forward | | x | x | x | | x | | x |
| Game of Human Rights | x | x | | | | x | x | |
| Power Flower | | x | | x | x | x | | |
| The Ladder of Participation | | | | | | | x | |
| Missiles or territory | | | x | x | x | | | |

Objectives according to IO 2

(Description: Development of the „Democracy- Intervention- Set“)

- (1) Basic democracy tool: description of the political landscape. Description of current political systems. Overview of the EU.
- (2) Tools to help young adults identify and verbalise, locating one's own political convictions (self-efficacy).
- (3) Helping to recognize anti-democratic tendencies/attitudes of the counterpart and to respond to it.
- (4) Distinction from values/positions that do not correspond to one's own. Tolerance towards other population groups.
- (5) Detecting manipulation.
- (6) Becoming aware of the connection between one's own fears, desires and hopes in the political opinion-forming.
- (7) Active citizenship: voter turnout, EU citizenship.
- (8) Assistance in the replacement of anti- democratic groups.

Hiding Place Simulation:

This is a simulation, which works great with young people, because they are passionate about their values and beliefs. The simulation shows how these values and beliefs if firmly held and if tried to be imposed on other people can lead to conflicts. On the basis of the simulation the trainers can discuss with young people about stereotypes and prejudice, about accepting other peoples' values and beliefs. The process of making a decision during the simulation is a democratic decision-making process and can be used as an example and as a basis for discussion on democratic decision making.

Draw the Animal of Democracy:

The Drawing of a concept method is best used as an introduction to a topic. It is a participatory method with which a group of trainees or participants in a workshop can get to know each other and each other's views on the topic of the training or the workshop. It is a good combination between an icebreaker and a discussion instrument for almost any topic. In the case of developing democratic attitudes it can be used to introduce the concept of democracy, to discuss about human rights and democratic institutions. The method uses creativity and drawing to tap into the creative resources of the group and help them relax and discuss what they think about democracy. It is very useful also for the trainers, because they can evaluate the knowledge and attitudes, with which the group enters the workshop.

We are the world:

On this planet we share, we are all connected in some way, to the extent that the actions of some have consequences for others, good and bad. No one any longer doubts the effect that global warming is having on weather patterns around the globe, for example. Yet, as individuals, we continue to believe that nations and their historical development are independent of each other.

Societies have increasingly grouped together on the basis of historical, cultural or geographical affinities, with the idea that, on the other side of the border, there is another society that lives and develops independently of my own, but reality sets in and we need to be aware that we cannot continue to nurture the fantasy that everyone can go about their lives independently of everyone else. Ours is an interdependent world, in which our societies are interconnected and their development is mutually beneficial, while problems are a threat to us all.

The aim of "We are the world" is to visualize and demonstrate this in a practical and controlled way while learning that through global solidarity we all win.

Structured Democratic Dialogue Process:

The Structured Democratic Dialogue Process (SDDP) is a scientific methodology for large-scale collaborative design. This method is very effective when used with young people as it can help them develop skills and competences needed for resolving multiple conflicts and problems that are more and more complex over the years. The strategic character of the dialogue process and the promotion of a place-based and bottom-up approach can have long term outcomes on the participants rather than temporary results. In addition, through this method, mutual understanding is facilitated as well as the development of mutual trust between the participants. Furthermore, the networking skills of the participants are improved while the participation on equal basis that the round table discussion entails, promotes respect of the autonomy of all participants. Worldwide applications of SDDPs are

monitored by the Global Agoras community, who is also extending and developing the methodology further to address shortcomings and to enable scaling-up. Many governments, EC and CoE projects, businesses, and NGOs have applied SDDP successfully. In conclusion, the Structured Democratic Dialogue is a very effective group decision-making methodology for managing complex problems with the participation of many parties.

Decentration through images:

Decentration through images is a methodology developed by Emerique Coen and applied within the Welcomm project (implemented by CESIE and other partners) as an activity to experience cultural shock in a safe environment and understand how all of us carry “lenses” through which we see reality. In Reach YOUth the potential of this exercise takes its shape as an art walk through which participants experience pleasant and unpleasant feelings connected with what they see. The trainers’ task is to help participants discuss their feelings and rationalize why they feel this way and what are the consequences of their values and worldviews in the real world. The ultimate goal of the activity then is to help young people realize we all have different values and backgrounds, which is normal, and help them remain rational and focused when they are confronted with highly emotional situations or narratives playing with them (e.g. propaganda).

Model United Nations (MUN):

Model United Nations (MUN) is an educational simulation aiming to train participants, mostly young people in international negotiations for the promotion of human rights and democracy, but also to the development of good communication, international relations and diplomacy. MUN is a valuable experience that will help participants develop their confidence in leading others and cultivate a stronger awareness of global issues. In addition, it can help them to develop public speaking, writing and research skills. Furthermore, MUN can act as the first entry point of the participants into international affairs and introduce them to the wide range of peace and security, human rights, development and rule of law issues that are on the UN agenda. Even though we are not sure when the first Model UN simulation took place, MUN conferences are an outgrowth of simulations of the League of Nations that date back to the 1920’s. Today, the popularity of Model UN continues to grow. It is estimated that more than 400,000 students worldwide participate every year at all educational levels from primary school to university.

One Step Forward:

One Step Forward is a powerful interactively designed methodology. This method aims at a playful insight into the different privileges and deprivileges in society that bring individuals or in this case participants to the front or leave them further behind. This comparison inevitably leads to a reflection on social categories such as status, education, background and social environment and their relevance and significance for oneself and for society. One step forward is a very touching and moving intervention.

Game of Human Rights:

Game of Human Rights is a very exciting intervention. Imagine a dictator taking away your human rights one by one?! This method harbours various subjective emotions. The aim is to recognize which human rights we actually enjoy and the fact that we take many things for granted or even don't know the importance of some human rights.

After this intervention, the participants will understand how significant political participation can be and that politics is a matter very close to us.

Power Flower:

Power Flower is a method that aims to show participants where their own social standpoint is and what it means for society or what advantages and disadvantages it brings with it. Categories such as "financial situation", "education", "social origin", "languages" or "gender" lead to a subjective assessment of personal strength, hence the name power flower. It is important to recognise how one deals with one's strength or disadvantageous weaknesses. At the same time, this method criticises the dualistic system of social attribution of differentiation categories and wants to make clear that an individual can have very diverse characteristics and does not fit into one scheme, which does not have to be a disadvantage! Power flower is an intervention that can initiate a lively discussion, as resistance to the dual system of German society can arise and on the other hand, the fact will arise that people still think and act in these categories today, which is no longer appropriate for a diverse reality.

The Ladder of Participation:

The method invites young people discuss the issue of youth participation in society focusing on the several areas of their life (community, neighbourhood, school, youth or sport clubs etc.). Using the ladder of participation by Roger Hart as a guiding principle the activity helps young people share their own personal experience with participation, identify meaningful forms of participation and tokenistic ones and ultimately assess obstacles and enabling factors in terms of participation with their peers. The point of the exercise is support young people to understand that although they might not always be in control of the above-mentioned factors, there are plenty of strategies and things they can still do in order to participate in their community and make sure the decision are taken involve them.

Missiles or territory

The activity "Missiles or territory" is aimed at encouraging reflection on peace and conflict, conflict resolution and the importance of a culture of peace.

The United Nations defines the culture of peace as a set of values, attitudes and behaviors based on the rejection of violence, alternatively proposing dialogue and negotiation as a way to resolve conflicts between individuals, groups and nations. The activity's objective, when fulfilled, is to practically show how convenient dialogue is as opposed to violence.

6. UNDERLYING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

The individual initial letters of the name of the project Reach YOUth will be used to explain the underlying pedagogical approach.

R espect

E mpowerment

A cceptance and Appreciation

C ulture Diversity

H umanistic approach

Y oung person centred

O pen - minded

U nique

T olerance

H olistic

6.1 Respect

Reach YOUth trainers respect all the people they deal with in the course of the Reach YOUth project in their so-being with very individual life paths, attitudes, constructions of reality, achievements to date and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

Like any effective counselling method, the use of Reach YOUth interventions must be underpinned by ethical considerations and guidelines to protect the young people involved. The ethical guidelines at the end of the curriculum are derived from the Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland (2010) and the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2012). As a European partner, these guidelines should be used in conjunction with the national ethics policies and practices of each country.

We categorize ethical behaviour into four different areas that can help guiding the practice of Reach YOUth trainers

- Respect for the rights and dignity of the person
- Competence
- Responsibility

- Integrity

A detailed description of these categories can be found at the end of this working paper.

6.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is the „process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals.“¹

The Reach YOUth approach considers all participants as well as the group as an expert.

The people we work with are the experts of their lives. They carry within them the ability to activate their inner growth. They know the best of/their:

- ✓ history with successes and failures, pleasant und unpleasant memories, repetitions and exceptions
- ✓ living situation
- ✓ themselves with wishes and fears, with unclear feelings and inner conflicts
- ✓ family, friends...
- ✓ previous solution strategies
- ✓ own abilities, competences, possibilities and limits

By 'the group is the expert' is meant that questions, topics, ideas and impulses are always discussed in the group or arise from it. The role of the RY trainer is to act as facilitators, to bring the group into the discussion, to bundle the contents of discussions and so on. The trainer is not seen as a hierarchically superior or 'expert' who passes on her knowledge to the participants or evaluates the content.

Learning knowledge is created through interaction of experience.

Reach YOUth presupposes the conviction of development possibilities of the participants and aims to strengthen their own strengths. Development is possible in any situation and people have the skills to take responsibility for their development.

Systemically oriented educators assume the autonomy of those seeking advice and help and regard them as "experts in their own right". The individual experience of each person is understood as the subjective processing of their life-history, affective and cognitive relationship experiences.

¹ (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998, p.91).

6.3 Acceptance and Appreciation

The young people, with their personal life paths and careers, personality traits, characteristics, skills, strengths and weaknesses in their "so-being", must be accepted and valued first. This can be a great challenge in their concrete work, as Reach YOUth trainers will encounter many different, sometimes controversial views and concepts of life in the course of the project. Reach YOUth aims to teach young people about democratic values, current political developments, acceptance, tolerance, respect and opportunities to participate in society. (They should learn to critically analyse what they are taught and to recognise the connections between their own attitudes and their socio-cultural background as well as politics and power on the one hand and their chances and limits to change something in their own sense) on the other hand.

In the course of discussions, young people will maybe also express discriminatory or racist attitudes. In such cases or in case of transgressions of rules, non-social or non-target behaviour, it is still necessary to appreciate the person, but to question the behaviour or attitude and to confront the young people with the opinions of the other participants and the trainers or third parties, the existing agreements, rules and laws, as well as the consequences of their thoughts and actions. This is also part of a serious and appreciative attitude.

In addition to the accepting and accompanying aspects, appreciation also includes demanding and promoting independence and the assumption of responsibility. It is not the purpose of work to relieve young people of work or to 'carry them through life', but to enable them to 'start doing' and working independently.

*„It`s not about wrong or right in your evaluation
but about understanding the logic of behaviour.“
Wilfried Schneider*

Instead of asking about right or wrong, we should ask:

*"Do things seem to be the way a person sees them and the way
she/he approaches them helpful for themselves and others/ the group or society?"*

6.4 Culture Diversity & Constructivism

“Cultural diversity, or sometimes referred to as multiculturalism, is a quality of diverse and many different cultures. Cultural Diversity a system that recognizes and respects the existence and presence of diverse groups of people within a society. The system values their socio-cultural differences and encourages each individual to celebrate it. An environment with diverse cultures also inspires everyone within the society to make significant contribution to empower their cultural identity as well as others’. The phrase cultural diversity doesn’t only relate to or refer to matters of race or ethnicities. A cultural diverse workplace also means a system where people are recognized and respected for their different interests, talents, and skills.

Through an inclusive and diverse lens, we can explore and understand how other cultures operate and function. Opening our eyes to the existence of diverse and different cultures allows us to see the world from other’s points of view. We can see more, appreciate more, and understand more. Understanding is a crucial step before accepting and appreciating, it is the same for understanding different cultures around the world. Even if when we’re unable to understand why certain cultures do the things they do, we’re able to acknowledge it as their custom and not discriminate.

However, total acceptance needs tact and awareness. Some cultures and cultural practices may violate human rights in the general society's view. We must work towards educating the public without discriminating or insulting the community that culture or cultural practices belong to."²

"Cultural diversity (...) refers to the existence of multiple identities and cultures within and between human groups and societies. Cultural diversity is a manifestation of diversity. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity postulates that cultural diversity is "as important to humanity as biological diversity is to nature as a source of exchange, renewal and creativity". "In the face of present-day economic and technological change, opening up vast prospects for creation and innovation, particular attention must be paid to the diversity of the supply of creative work, to due recognition of the rights of authors and artists and to the specificity of cultural goods and services which, as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods."³

One aspect of cultural diversity is language diversity. "Creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures."⁴

The concept of cultural diversity or cultural diversity has been taken up in other international declarations and conventions, such as the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), the Montreal Declaration (2007) and European Union documents.

Cultural diversity is seen as one of the roots of cultural change, understood as the path to a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

What does this mean in practice for the RY trainers?

First of all it means that all RY trainers must have studied the pedagogical approach and the ethical guidelines in depth. Furthermore, they should have experienced all the exercises as trainers and participants and have a reflective attitude towards anti-discrimination, racism, prejudice, etc.

It is very important that participants do not want to impose their own values (such as the values of a rather individualistic society in comparison to more collectivist values), but rather to stimulate thought processes and to bring participants into exchange with each other.

Constructivism

Constructivists assume that there is no absolute reality in the world. Sensory perceptions are not images of an absolute reality, but individual subjective constructions.

This view has the consequence that all perceptions are accepted by others, no matter how far off our perception. It is no longer the environment that determines human behaviour, but the human being alone that is responsible for itself.

² [Cultural Diversity - The Ultimate Guide to Cultural Competence \[2021\]](#)

³ [UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: UNESCO](#) , Article 8 – Cultural goods and services: commodities of a unique kind

⁴ S. above, Article 7- Cultural heritage as the wellspring of creativity

“In the theory of social constructivism, it says that there are always several individual Versions Of reality exist (Kruse, 2018). Individuals construct an own model of the world (Flammer, 2018), which is based on their personal contexts (e.g.: historical, cultural, economic, etc.) and experience (Steins, 2010). So if reality is individual and exists in several versions, it can not be objective or universal.

These constructed realities are maintained, among other things, through socialisation. An individual internalises the values and norms of a society, are convictions and norms standards of conduct, which can then be applied in interaction with other individuals (Steins, 2010). Kruse (2018) calls the realities of a majority society is also a "matter of course" and explains that the social constructivism, this "matter of course" is to be critically examined. Question them in order to expose them as constructs.”⁵

6.5 Humanistic approach

The humanistic image of man was partly created in antiquity (Greeks), was revived in the time of the Enlightenment (18th century, Goethe etc.) and has been formulated in its present form mainly by humanistic psychology.

Humanistic psychology was developed in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s by the psychologists A. Maslow, C. Rogers, F. Perls, E. Fromm and others as a counter-movement to the previous psychology (psychoanalysis and behavioural psychology) and to the authoritarian view of humanity which had been dominant until then.

Rogers' theoretical approach is based on a humanistic view of man:

- Human dignity is inviolable.
- Man is essentially good, creative and social.
- Man is free and capable of conscious and purposeful action and will. Every human being is fundamentally capable of change and problem-solving.
- Every human being wants to grow, to develop itself and its own abilities or possibilities.
- The human being is seen as a holistic being (cognition, emotion and motivation) whose goal is self-realisation. It is assumed that every person is able to use the personal abilities in the best possible way to satisfy all his/her needs.
- Humanists assume that all behaviour is sense- and goal-oriented. Destructive behaviour arises when the self-realisation tendency is disturbed by external influences.⁶

⁵ <https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/sozialkonstruktivismus>

⁶ Comparison [Humanistic Theory by Psychologist Carl Rogers \(eln.co.uk\)](http://eln.co.uk)

6.6 Young person - centred

Picking people up where they stand' to enter into a cooperative work alliance.

How can we achieve this?

- ✓ Orientate on resources and strengths
- ✓ Talking/ asking about the interests of the young people
- ✓ Adoption of the language jargon, adoption of posture
- ✓ Picking up on situational factors (topics, body language signals, weather...)
- ✓ Adopt existing values (to a certain and adequate extent)

To be and stay person centered it is crucial to be and stay:

- ✓ Open
- ✓ Appreciative and empathetic
- ✓ Authentic and congruent
- ✓ Self-reflective

6.7. Open - minded

The young people decide on the content of the joint work at each stage of the counselling process. They, with the support of the trainer and peers, determine the themes, objectives and targets as well as the pace of the work.

For the trainers there is a risk of evaluating, categorising and no longer openly listening and perceiving. Own topics, hypotheses, values or goals are then focused and participants own ideas are adapted. There is a scheduled time in the counselling process for participants to express their own hypotheses, ideas and suggestions, and they look and decide what they accept and listen to. They retain responsibility for the content of the process. Of course the trainer in his/her role as a moderator can steer discussions in a certain direction through their own contributions and questions.

6.8 Unique

Every person is individual and unique: with a specific socio-cultural background, grown up in certain historical and geographical contexts, with individual life experiences and living conditions, with a highly individual way of thinking, acting and feeling.

6.9 Trust

One of the main tasks of a Reach YOUth trainer is to create a welcoming and protected environment.

In addition to the assumed knowledge about the importance of relationship work, room design etc., the following points are of particular importance:

- Participation is voluntary and can be interrupted or terminated at any time.
- All contents discussed remain 'in the room' and are not passed on to outsiders.
- Each participant takes care of him/herself: this means that they can express their needs and wishes concerning the process and the content at any time.

Relevant aspects are discussed in the last chapter 'ethical guidelines' at the end of the curriculum in detail.

6.10 Holistic

- Holistically with body, soul and spirit.
- Inclusion of several learning channels levels and senses.
- Special features of the topic: education for democracy.

7. GUIDELINES FOR THE TRAINERS

Many aspects concerning the role and tasks of the Reach YOUth trainer have already been mentioned in the previous section and are explained in the chapters of the trainer profile and ethical guidelines. At this point, the aspects already mentioned are bundled and further important ones are added.

There are also parts of knowledge transfer before and after exercises and trainers also provide their own resonances and opinions, but first and foremost it is the task of the RY trainer:

- to create protected spaces for exchange.
- to facilitate a process - to see the individual participants and the group as experts.
- to initiate an exchange and
- to initiate thought processes.
- to accompany participants.
- to get them to reflect on their attitudes.

It is not a question of imposing one's own opinions on them, of wanting to impose something on them from the outside that does not correspond to their life world or does not dock with their resources and needs.

This curriculum is aimed at social workers, pedagogues and professionals who have come to know and appreciate the Reach YOUth approach and who want to train other professionals in the Reach YOUth approach through their own experiences as a participant and also as a trainer who has carried out the interventions with groups and feels confident in dealing with them.

In practice this could mean:

- Let the group summarize/ formulate learning outcomes themselves.
- Create different settings and possibility for each to express: Calm and expressive.
- Have the resources and the needs of the participants in mind and react: E.g. this could mean to use icons or symbols if there are some difficulties with understanding contents or the language and
- Respond situationally to needs and events.
- The interventions have a certain intention: It could happen that the discussion and needs of the participants don't or do match these planned learning objectives and effects the trainers try to empower the young people to build up their personal reflected opinion.

- Take always care of the protected frame: Everybody has to feel safe and protected.

Applied to the Reach YOUth Project, this means that we understand our role as RY trainer as not wanting to impose our values and help on people, but rather to initiate thought processes and support people in developing their own ideas.

8. REACH YOUTH – ETHICAL GUIDELINE AND COMPETENCIES OF REACH YOUTH TRAINERS

In this chapter we will describe in detail the ethical guidelines and competences of Reach YOUth Trainer inside (based on the curriculum of SymfoS- Symbols for succes: www.symfos.eu in the download area).

Reach YOUth trainer skills

The fundamental condition to become a Reach YOUth trainer is the high interest and the readiness to try out different roles within various sessions. Because of the effect and the power it is important to have experienced all different roles, before applying and teaching the method:

- The person being counselled
- The observer
- The counsellor

The description of Reach YOUth trainer skills distinguishes between the following:

Basic skills for counselling and coaching, key skills required for counselling and coaching.

8.1 Basic skills for counselling and coaching

- The ability to assume the basic pedagogic attitude as described above.
- The ability to reflect on one's own work: The trainer should be willing and able to reflect on his/her work – his/her own approach, the precise wording of the questions, the proportion of the time he spent talking, body language (facial expression, posture, hands) and distance from the participant.
- The ability to act as a moderator for group processes – see special abilities.
- The ability to think holistically, to consider people's situations holistically, and provide goal-oriented counselling.

8.2 Key skills required for counselling and coaching

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching:

“... as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”⁷

The description of the core skills of a Reach YOUth trainer is based on a list of skills issued by the ICF, modified with regard to the requirements of Reach YOUth trainers as coaches and counsellors. The core skills are grouped in four clusters. The groups themselves and the individual skills are not weighted, i.e. are not ranked in any way.

A. Setting the Foundation

1. Compliance with ethical guidelines and professional standards: Understanding of coaching and counselling ethics and standards and the ability to apply them appropriately in all situations.
2. Establishment of an agreement: This includes a clear understanding of roles, a professional level of intimacy with the participant, and clear goal agreements. At the beginning of a counselling session, opportunities and limits, as well as the role of the trainer, should be clearly identified. Clear goals should be agreed while maintaining an appropriate level of intimacy throughout the counselling session.

B. Co-creating the relationship

3. The ability to establish a trusting relationship with the participant and create an appropriate group atmosphere: It is important to establish a safe, goal-oriented framework and to ensure respectful, trusting interaction.
4. Coaching presence: The ability to act consciously and remain mindful throughout the entire counselling process: it is important to observe, listen, and feel what the participant is communicating and to feel one's own resonances and, if necessary, integrate these into the counselling process.

C. Communicate effectively

5. Active listening: The ability to concentrate entirely on what the participant is saying and not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the participant's goals and desires, and to support the participant's expressive ability.
6. Open, resource- and solution oriented, goal-focused questions: The ability to pose appropriate questions depending on the circumstances and phase of the counselling. Open-ended questions serve to facilitate understanding and foster productive work with the participant; resource-oriented questions support the participant in discovering skills and abilities, and solution-oriented, goal-focused questions allow solutions to be found.

⁷ <https://coachfederation.org/about>

D. Facilitate learning and goal achievement

7. Establish awareness: the ability to integrate several sources of information, assessing and interpreting these in such a way that it helps the participant to achieve awareness, thus to enable him or her to reach his/her agreed goals.

8. Planning and setting goals: the ability to develop an effective plan of action together with the participant, assign responsibilities to peers, and, if necessary, agree deadlines.

An extensive description of the core competencies can be found at: ⁸

9. ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR TRAINERS

9.1 Background

Like any effective guidance methodology, the use of Reach YOUth tools must be underpinned by ethical considerations and guidelines in order to safeguard those involved in its use. The ethical guidelines outlined below derive from both the Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland (2010), and the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2012). As a European partnership, these guidelines should be used in conjunction with each country's own national ethical codes and practices of professional conduct.

The Code of Ethics of the PSI (2010) and the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2012) categorize ethical conduct into four distinct domains which can help to inform and guide the practice of Reach YOUth trainers:

- Respect for the rights and dignity of the person
- Competence
- Responsibility
- Integrity

9.2 Respect for the rights and dignity of the person

General respect:

- Trainers of the Reach YOUth methodology should have an awareness and respect for their participants' moral and cultural values, and not allow their service to be diminished
- Due to factors such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, age, national origin, party politics, social standing or class.
- Reach YOUth trainers should always use respectful language in written/verbal communication and act to protect the dignity and wellbeing of participants at all times throughout the Reach YOUth process.

⁸ <http://www.coachfederation.org/icfcredentials/core-competencies/>

Privacy and confidentiality:

- Reach YOUth trainers should, to the best of their ability, ensure that sessions occur in a private environment and that only essential and relevant information needed for the purpose of the Reach YOUth methodology is collected.
- Trainers should avoid unjustified intrusion of the participants' psychological boundaries. Reach YOUth trainers should ensure that information regarding the participant, is shared only with the participants' informed consent and that participant files and documents are stored confidentially for an appropriate amount of time (determined by law and national professional requirements) and then destroyed.
- All participants should be informed of the confidentiality of their participation in the Reach YOUth methodology, and the situations (determined by law) in which this confidentiality may be broken (e.g. in the case of danger to oneself).

Informed consent and freedom of consent:

- Reach YOUth trainers must take all reasonable steps to receive informed consent (via written consent forms), free from coercion or in situations where the participant may feel obligated or under pressure to consent. In the case of a child/minor, trainers must receive the informed consent of a parent/guardian.
- Participants should be provided with enough accurate and detailed information to depict the activity for which they are participating, prior to their agreement to participate.
- Participants should also be informed of their right to withdraw from participation, even after the beginning of the process.
- Consent must be provided prior to any video, audio or written recording of the participant, and the participant must give permission for any third party to be present for the given activity.
- Information regarding the participant must only be published or shared with others with the participant's informed consent.
- External ethical reviews should take place for any participant of a vulnerable group or of diminished capacity to provide informed consent, prior to the participation of the participant.

Self-determination:

- Reach YOUth trainers should aim to achieve as active participation as possible of the participants in decisions which affect them.
- Reach YOUth trainers should respect the right of participants to protect their own dignity, and to withdraw their participation at any time. Trainers should also be aware of and responsive to non-verbal indicators of the desire of the participant to withdraw their participation.

9.3 Competences

Ethical awareness:

- Reach YOUth trainers must accept their professional responsibility to be aware of ethical guidelines, in order to ensure their practice is safe and beneficial to all parties involved.

- Reach YOUTH trainers should avoid engaging in professional activities which may conflict with professional ethical best practice.

Limits of competence:

- Trainers must be mindful of how their own attitudes and beliefs may impact upon a participant and act to prevent this having a negative effect on participants.
- Trainers must be aware of their own limits, and not exceed the limitations of their education/training or experience when engaging professionally with a participant.
- Reach YOUTH trainers should act to refer a participant to a more appropriate service or professional if they deem this service would be of greater benefit to the participant.

Limits of procedures:

- Reach YOUTH trainers must be aware of both the strengths and limitations of the tools they use with participants and communicate these with participants and relevant third parties.
- Trainers should base their interventions on clear objectives and cease intervention if the objective has been met or is impossible to meet.
- Trainers should carry out pilot studies prior to the implementation of new processes, and withhold from engaging in any activity in which the harm caused to a participant may outweigh the benefit.

Continuing Professional Development:

- Reach YOUTH trainers have a responsibility to continuously maintain their professional competence through individual education, training and supervision.
- Reach YOUTH trainers should engage in self-care to avoid the development of conditions (e.g. burnout) which might reduce their own wellbeing or impact negatively on the participant, and to seek support from colleagues or supervisors should they need it.
- Trainers should remain up-to-date with recent research methods, techniques and progress, and ensure that the tools they use or train other trainers in, meet the theoretical developments of the most recent research in the field.

Incapacity for practice:

- Reach YOUTH trainers should recognize and refrain from engaging in professional interactions in which their ability to benefit the participant is impaired (e.g. a significant physical or psychological condition which may harm a participant).

9.4 Responsibility

General responsibility:

- Reach YOUTH trainers have a responsibility to act in a professional and reputable manner, befitting the behavior of their professional field, and to promote the best practice of this field where possible.

- Reach YOUth trainers also have a responsibility to report or make known policies, procedures or regulations which ignore or oppose their professional code of ethics.

Promotion of high standards:

- Reach YOUth trainers have a responsibility to maintain high standards in their professional practice and to act in a way that does not undermine the principles or reputation of their professional field.

Avoidance of harm:

- Reach YOUth trainers have a responsibility to prevent or avoid activities which may cause harm to a participant.
- Trainers should avoid engaging with participants who are likely to be harmed or negatively impacted by their participation.
- Trainers should postpone or stop activities as soon as harm to the participant is observed.
- Trainers must ensure that tools are only used by professionals who are trained to use them.
- Trainers must ensure that participant information is stored in a confidential manner and cannot be used to inflict harm or loss of dignity/integrity.

Continuity of care:

- If the trainer deems the referral of a participant to be necessary, contact and support should be maintained with the participant until the contract has ended and the participant has made contact with the recommended professional.

Resolving dilemmas:

- All arising conflicts should be resolved in accordance with the Reach YOUth ethical Guidelines and each partner's national ethical codes and professional guidelines.

9.5 Integrity

Honesty and accuracy:

- Reach YOUth trainers should honestly and accurately portray their own education, training and experience, and act to avoid distortion or exaggeration of their own competence, the capacity of the tools being used or other relevant factors.
- Reach YOUth trainers should be careful to differentiate their own views and opinions from that of research findings when communicating with participants or other professionals.

Straightforwardness and Openness:

- Reach YOUth trainers should provide participants with a clear understanding of any results or observations of their session in language they clearly understand.

Actions of colleagues:

- Reach YOUth trainers have a responsibility to stop, make known or report the behavior of a colleague which is deemed to be harmful or unethical.
- Reach YOUth trainers should offer appropriate support or supervision to colleagues who request it.

For more information regarding ethical best practice see: ⁹

⁹ <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/PSI-Code-of-Professional-Ethics-3>

<http://www.igc.ie/about-us/our-constitution/code-of-ethics>

10. ANNEX:

Importance and necessity of democracy education (complete text)

The following text refers to the themes and understanding of democracy, anti-democratic tendencies, populism, radicalization process, far-right and Islamic extremism. The intent of this text is a quick introduction on why our interventions and f2f training are important for youth workers and for young people who will benefit from them. The aim is portraying the importance of youth work in contributing to young people democratic value uptake as well as preventing young people involvement into radicalization processes and extremist groups.

Democracy

Democracy is complex and although the majority of European countries nowadays has a democratic constitution, this has not always been the way things went.

On a constitutional sense, democracy means that the power belongs to the people, who then, through democratic election, delegate their representatives to decide over the upcoming future of the country, its standing in international politics and geopolitical issues, how to deal with societal change and the way to go ahead with key part of what one can define the collective well-being of the population (including economy, welfare, education, healthcare, labor market and its regulation, leisure activities, environment and so forth).

Democracy is based on the principle that no one has the right to impose worldviews, ideologies and laws over the population. By contrast executive decisions are taken as a result of the dialectic conflict between parties in the political arena, which is where democracy sources its legitimacy. By harnessing social conflict and opposed worldviews into political debate and dialogue between “factions” (political parties) a democratic society is free to determine its political standing based on elections and vote. Elections must be free and open to all people, only condition for voting are: holding a citizenship and being of voting age. This applies also to regional and local politics where only residents of one municipality for instance could vote for the election of the major¹⁰.

Constitutions and its safeguards¹¹

By being a representative democracy, it must make sure that even if after the election the majority has the power to rule, it does so by respecting all the minorities who have lost the elections. In order to guarantee that the ruling parties do not modify the law in a discriminatory or harassing way towards minorities, most democratic countries have constitutional provisions. These include the provisions regarding human rights, political and civil rights and anti-discriminatory policies. In a democracy, all citizens have the same right to vote and participate to the public life regardless their gender, religious affiliation, political standing (unless the political standing is illegal as the case of Fascism in Italy), sexual orientation and wealth and social status, language spoken and ethnicity.

A democratic state, to be called one, must have universal values and principles that must always be there in the democratic process. These values are:

- Freedom: This means both individually and collectively, citizens are free to express themselves and choose for themselves as long as this remains within the boundaries set by the law.

¹⁰ S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt, 2018

¹¹ Ibid.

- Dialogue: as opposed to conflict (violent and verbal) a democracy seeks continuously to find the common point between political adversaries through dialogue and dialectic.
- Equality: as mentioned before, in a democracy all citizens are equal both as individuals and as members of collective groups.
- Pluralism: meaning that democratic countries accept and embrace and value diversity both at societal and political level.
- Justice: all people must be treated fairly and equally, all human rights must be guaranteed to each and every citizen of the given democracy.

The importance of Democratic values

A democratic society is safe from political violence and authoritarian regimes if, democratic values are upheld by society. The willingness of citizen to commit to democratic institution, procedures and behaviors is proportional to the success of such institution and procedures in determining a democratic society. When this dual bond is broken, institutions could act less democratically and citizen could start adopting undemocratic tendencies, to the detriment of European peaceful, equal and inclusive societies.

Main challenges to democracy

Nowadays, democracies all around the world face problems due to a spike in antidemocratic tendencies among the population. Even though humanity is experiencing an unprecedented level of prosperity and safety, the internal political debate of many democracies has become way more polarized and the public opinion support towards democracy is slowly winding down. This process has several interlocked root causes; however, its symptoms are widespread across most European countries. It is easy to spot the effect of this crisis of democracy if one takes a look at the raising of far-Right and populist political groups all over Europe.

The growing discontent towards the economy and the perception of inequality in many areas of society (unemployment, salaries, gender-related issues, racial discrimination, etc), are a driving factor as far as the rising of these anti-democratic sentiments is concerned. However, these tendencies are not going to generate a sensible response to these problems but will only contribute to make them worse. While populism degrades the quality of political debate and leadership from a fact-based single issue debate to a broader emotional and often detrimental distrust between parties, extremist group exploit the uncertainty to undermine social cohesion and impact negatively society reducing further the ability of most citizens to participate freely in the public life of the country.

Populism

Populism is defined as the tendency of political leaders to appeal to the “common folks” by portraying their interests as violated by a corrupt elite which encompasses all existing political parties. On an ideological level populism often mixes up left wing and right-wing ideas and solutions. Often populist leaders take up a nationalistic tone blaming other countries or minorities as those responsible for the problem the country is facing. These political recipes often are spiced up with some degrees of racism, conspiracy mongering and other dangerous undemocratic ideas which aims at concentrating more and more power in the hand of a charismatic leader. Populism is always dangerous because it undermines the democratic procedures and values of a society ultimately leading bad leadership, inconsistent policy making and even dictatorship-like power setting. The extent to which a populist movement gain power over democratic institutions depends on the strengths of populist movements as well as the maturity and dept of democratic values in a given society. Mature democracy can deal with populist leaders better than “young” democracies.

Propaganda

Propaganda has a huge impact on the existence and spreading of dangerous extremist narratives as well as contributing to the radicalization process of individuals as well as putting them in contact with extremist groups.

According to the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN, 2019), Propaganda is “the strategic communication of ideas, aimed at manipulating specific target audiences for an extremist cause”. This means that the whole message and communication of extremist groups is oriented towards a target (category of people they have identified as those who would most likely be impacted by their message). But this also means that the feeling and emotions the target of the message will have to feel are set up to buy it’s heart to the cause. A good example of this logic is threat-mongering:

1. A threat is presented to a group of people e.g. Muslims are under attack in the middle east and soon they will be in Europe as well.
2. Targets identify themselves as belonging to the group under threat and develop a strong sense of belonging and their difference from the other groups (in/out group distinction).
3. This could further lead the target into a radicalization pathway towards extremist group which playing with these narratives and the identity, belonging, community needs of an individual can bring them even to justify the use of violence.

However, although many people are unhappy with the status quo and hold extreme views, very few of them are ready to actively support strategic violence in an attempt to fix what they don’t like.

Fake news

Fake news and conspiracy theories started to be a thing back in the early 1950s. Back then they mostly were fun made-up facts never actually happened and designed to strike a laugh out of people. Aside than the innocent fun ones though, fake news can be extremely dangerous tools for extremist groups or populist leaders to direct hate and anger against specific groups and/or recruit new supporters.

Populist groups started seeing the propaganda potential of these fake news and started developing and spreading fake news to emphasize how corrupt the elites are and how important it is for “the people” to take back control of the institution against the “establishment”. By doing so, these populist propaganda agencies undermine trust on institutions and politics depicting all politicians besides them as corrupt power greedy individuals with no morality whatsoever and in the worst cases either as puppets stringed by vested interest groups (e.g. George Soros, Big Pharma, etc) or foreign powers.

Fake news is also used by extremist groups to spread hate and recruit supporters. This kind of fake news though is even more dangerous because they play with underlying divisive narratives and fears. Fake news is designed to look and sound real and credible to the audience while their tone and description is misleading and geared towards passing a message to ignite strong emotional response in the reader. This emotional response is carefully directed towards the fear/anger spectrum, and seeks to make the reader feel either under threat or extremely angry against a specific group of people.

Polarization¹²

Political polarization is defined as the widening of the spectrum of acceptable political opinion towards the extremes (far-right and far-left). This phenomenon includes a shift of the public opinion

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_polarisation_management_manual_amsterdam_06072017_en.pdf

from a close to the center to a polarized set of ideas and values. Polarization is not a threat per se, sometimes it leads to positive outcomes, making possible progressive measures before thought of as “unrealistic” hence unlocking political outcomes for minorities. Sometimes, polarization of the public opinion is often used as a strategy by political activists to open up new grounds of debate or expand the spectrum of what is possible (how democracies die, S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt 2018). However, a systemic polarization when opposing parties tend to use a violent language, bringing the focus from fact-based single-issue debate to generalist and emotion-based broader discourses is a danger for our democracy since it mines the pillars of tolerance, dialogue and pluralism. The end of the process of polarization is the “us vs them”. This thought construct does not allow one people identifying themselves with one of the two parties to understand the other party as legitimate therefore increasing dangerous and undemocratic behaviors such as hate speech, violence (verbal and physical), intolerance and deliberate attacks on the counterpart rights and communities.

Extremism

Extremism is understood as the uptake of extreme political and identity-based views which tend to be based on the logic of the in-group vs out-group. The in-group is the group in which the individual identify themselves with. The out-group is the group of people who do not match with the identity of the ingroup. So, for instance, the in-group could be the “true Americans” (meaning that the individual feels that his way of living is the true American way of living) the out-group is Muslims, progressive left-wing politicians, environmentalists. However one wants to put it, for sure it is easy to spot right away how this ingroup tends to come down to any mean necessary to force their legitimacy against and at the expenses of the outgroup. Extremism then is a multi-faceted experience and varies greatly depending on the political stance, the identity and the political context in which it develops. Anyway, an individual who believes in extremist views on society is more likely to fall trapped into violent extremist political groups ultimately putting himself/herself and others at risk. Extremist groups such as Neo-Nazi, Neo-fascist and Jihadists groups are always looking out for new recruits among those most vulnerable to extremist world views, playing with their vulnerability to radicalize them.

Far-Right Extremism¹³

Far-Right extremism is an umbrella term for all groups belonging to the extreme right spectrum. The term puts together a wide range of ideologies gravitating around traditional Far-Right ideologies such as fascism. The key points of far-Right extremism though are: Racism, Xenophobia, Nationalism, Anti-establishment/anti-democratic stances, Call for a strong state, Occasionally also pro traditional gender role and anti-LGBTQI+ elements.

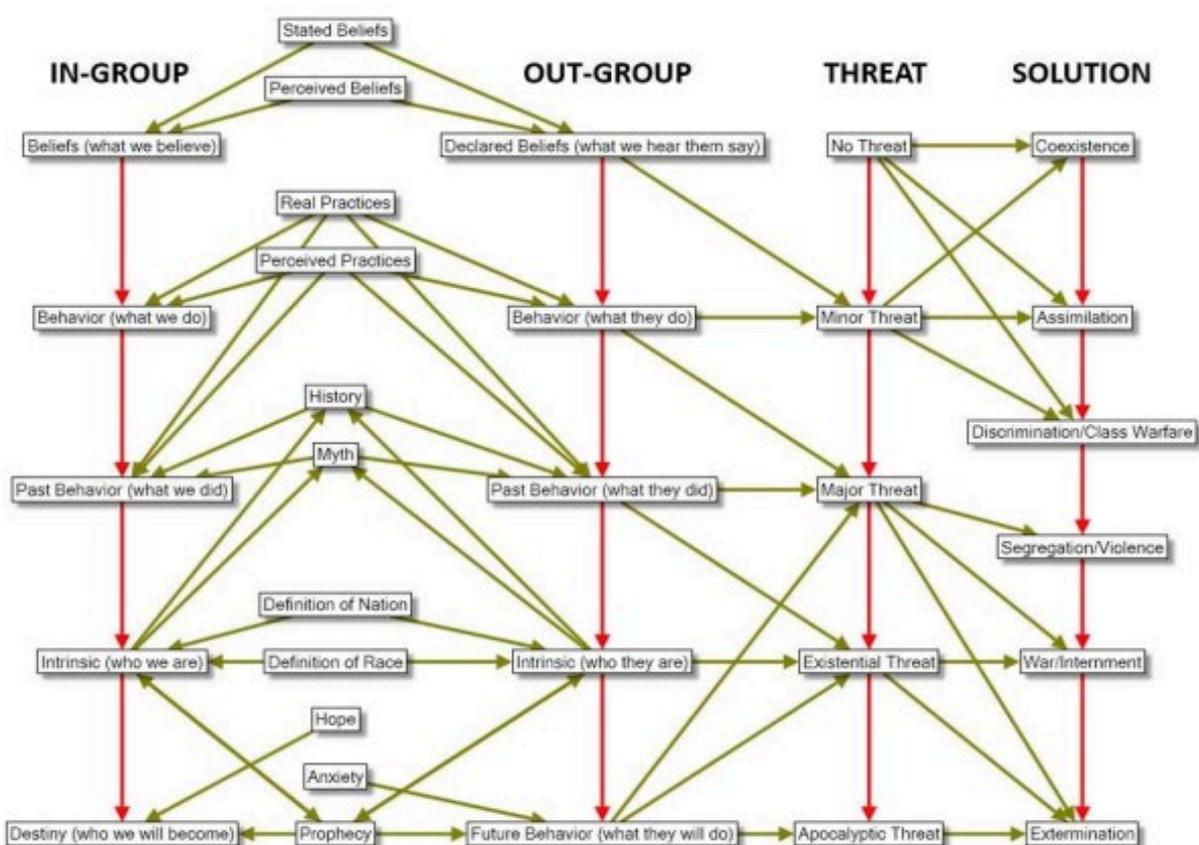
Although anti-democratic, most far right groups when criticized, often justify themselves as “only expressing opinions”. Anyway, according to the Radicalization Awareness Network, a Far-right attitude becomes problematic when advocating for civil rights and liberty restrictions towards a specific religious or ethnic group.

Islamist extremism¹⁴

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_fre_factbook_20191205_en.pdf

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_factbook_islamist_extremism_december_2019_en.pdf

“Islamist extremism” refers to different forms of extremist groups promoting violence and based on Islamic religious doctrines (e.g. Sunni or Shia Islam). The manifestation of these kind of extremist groups varies consistently across the EU territory. Violent Islamist extremists groups stand together in refuting the principle of the democratic rule of law and the expression of individual human rights. Both democracy and human rights are against what violent Islamist extremist groups believe in which is a literal interpretation of the principles of Islam which are the stretched and universalized as the only possible way of living. Groups such as Al-Qaeda or ISIS belongs to this category of extremist groups, although the most renowned due to their major visibility in the news landscape, they are far from being the only violent Islamist extremist groups out there.



Radicalization

Radicalization is a process defined by Berger as “the [...] adoption of increasingly negative ideas about an out-group and increasing harsh action against the out-group that are justifiable”¹⁵ This means that a person who does not like a particular group of people but would not actively hate them is not yet radicalized. Radicalization is the slow poisoning of one’s feelings against the out-group and the growing perceived threat from the outgroup. This leads to the increase of readiness of the

¹⁵ <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2017/04/ICCT-Berger-Extremist-Construction-of-Identity-April-2017-2.pdf>

radicalized person to commit aggressive acts against the out-group as well as falling in the trap of extremist groups.

At the base of the radicalization process, the UNOCD identifies:

“Push factors’: The conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges. These include: lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance, violations of human rights and the Rule of Law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalization in prisons”¹⁶.

“Pull factors’: The individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. These include: individual backgrounds and motivations; collective grievances and victimization stemming from domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks”¹⁷.

In other words, 'push factors' are structural societal factors e.g. lack of socioeconomic opportunities whereas pull factors refer to those affecting individuals in their psychological and emotional sphere hence making them more vulnerable to violent extremist groups and ideologies e.g. cultural differences.

How far-right plays with narratives¹⁸

Far-right extremist groups play with this push and pull factor to depict a world which resonate precisely to foster hatred mistrust and hate among groups as well as offering chances to feel the satisfaction of belonging to a group and “doing what’s right”. One of this narrative is the one lamenting a threat against national identities, immigration is depicted as something dangerous to natives and that national identities are in danger of “islamization”.

Another narrative is the one revolving around masculinity and the “natural order” of things being under threat because of LGBTI rights and Feminist propaganda.

Then on the victimhood side, far-right tend to accuse the government of favoring minorities at the expense of the majority (which is the only one entitled to a national identity). Last but not least, the narrative persuading people that self-governance and independence of nations is under threat because international institutions (UN, EU, NATO) have too much power over nations. These

¹⁶ <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

¹⁸ RAN POL and RAN C&N (2019) “Current and future narratives and strategies of far-right and islamist extremism”

institutions are accused of being made up by rich and powerful bureaucrats imposing their will over the common citizen and at their expenses.

How Islamic extremist play with narratives¹⁹

Islamic Extremists use similar emotional strategies based on threats and victimhood just as much as far-right extremists do, of course, the narrative part is different, but the aim at playing with the same set of emotions stays the same.

On the victimhood side they play with the sense of exclusion Muslim often feel due to the many hardships and obstacles they find in society. Most of the times this narrative is reinforced by factual element demonstrating how Muslims are discriminated against in western societies. Together with this narrative, another empowering narrative is used to push people to “take control” and become soldiers of Allah to defend Muslims from the aggressive behaviours of the hypocritical state which advocates for peace in Europe but then is ready to uptake aggressive military campaigns and atrocities in the middle east. This last narrative plays with the injustice feelings perceived both at home and against Muslims all around the world.

What about the kids!

Young people are incredibly vulnerable to all this. They seek for understanding, inclusion and and sense of belonging to a community. They tend to get emotional and heat up quickly for the things they care about and they tend to have romanticized views on reality, politics and ideology. Moreover, young people have it increasingly harder to find their place in society and at the same time meet the expectation of society. Loneliness, depression and mental health illnesses²⁰ are at a record high among young people in Europe.

Youth workers and practitioners alike are in a place of great importance to prevent young people’s radicalization process and help them understand the importance of democracy and its core values in order to live in a peaceful society where there is room for everyone and their grievances are dealt with through democratic action.

¹⁹ RAN POL and RAN C&N (2019) “Current and future narratives and strategies of far-right and islamist extremism”

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_h-sc_handbook-for-practitioners_extremism-radicalisation-mental-health_112019_en.pdf

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The e-learning network [Humanistic Theory by Psychologist Carl Rogers \(eln.co.uk\)](http://eln.co.uk)

Dorsch Lexikon der Psychologie <https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/sozialkonstruktivismus>

UNESCO Constitution [UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: UNESCO](https://www.unesco.org/en/convention)

Diversity for Social Impact [Cultural Diversity - The Ultimate Guide to Cultural Competence \[2021\]](https://www.diversityforimpact.com/cultural-diversity)

Additional video resources

Journalism and Polarization <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R3gzMONDUI>

Not another brother (anti-islamist extremism video) <https://youtu.be/ljIQ0ctzy>