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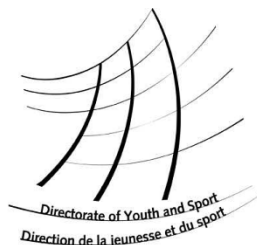


ATD Fourth World
Youth

“Making a stand for social justice! How young people are helping to build a socially cohesive Europe.”

Report of the study session held by
the International Movement ATD Fourth World Youth
in co-operation with the
European Youth Centre
of the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre Strasbourg
7-14 May 2006



Directorate of Youth and Sport
Direction de la jeunesse et du sport

This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

“Making a stand for social justice! How young people are helping to build a socially cohesive Europe.”

7-14 May 2006, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg

Study Session Report
by the
International Movement ATD Fourth World Youth

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Contents

Introduction _____ 5

About the International Movement ATD Fourth World _____ 6

Profile of participants _____ 7

Aims and objectives _____ 11

Challenges _____ 16

Preparing with participants _____ 18

Programme _____ 20

Outcomes: building a strong group feeling _____ 21

Outcomes: exploring the theme _____ 29

Outcomes: networking and multiplying _____ 35

Conclusion _____ 42

List of participants _____ 43

Organising team and invited speakers _____ 44

Introduction

The focus of this report is on the thinking and preparation behind a study session, which was perhaps a little unique in the way that it was conceived and designed to bring together young people from very different social backgrounds. We feel, as members of the organising team, that this was the principal achievement of our Study Session, and that it is also an important question for youth organisations active at European as well as local level. It is our belief that bringing together such a diverse group of young people is a statement in itself of the kind of Europe we want to create and what popular expressions like “youth participation” and “inclusive youth work” ought to mean in practice.

Over the last decade, Europe's youth sector, supported heavily by institutions such as the Council of Europe, has succeeded in being truly pan-European: young people from every corner of our continent are able to come together to share their knowledge, dreams and to help build the Europe of tomorrow in a way that, during the cold war, we would never have thought possible. However, we are not so sure that young people have as many opportunities or means to cross social barriers as easily as they can cross geographical ones. Young people with the fewest opportunities and in the most difficult situations have a lot to say about some of the most critical issues facing Europe, but rarely have they the chance or the security to meet young people from other backgrounds and contribute to the debate about the sort of Europe we want to live in. This is partly because it is not easy to reach and engage young people in real difficulty, but it is also because there is not enough willingness amongst those of us involved in international youth work to try and meet this challenge.

For young members of ATD Fourth World, this is the kind of challenge that we take on regularly through creating spaces and environments where we can cross social divides and meet one another in an atmosphere of equality and mutual respect. We hope that some of this spirit is captured in this study session report and that it inspires other youth organisations to try something similar.

About the International Movement ATD Fourth World

ATD Fourth World is a world-wide organisation working in some 29 countries. It takes a human rights approach to combating poverty and for nearly 50 years has enabled people living in poverty to come together and contribute to the development of their communities and their societies.

The organisation was founded in 1957, in an emergency housing camp outside of Paris, by Father Joseph Wresinski, who was himself born into poverty. The term “Fourth World” was coined by him to give a positive identity to people living in persistent poverty and to recognise their dignity, their refusal to accept poverty and social exclusion, and their contribution to society.

ATD Fourth World teams, working at grass roots level, develop close links with individuals and families living in poverty and work *with* them rather than for them, supporting them through various projects including street libraries, practical and cultural workshops, respite stay, holidays, and discussion groups. This grass roots presence then informs our representative work with the United Nations and its specialised bodies UNSECO and UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, and national and local government, to help bring about change on a wider scale.

Much of this work is carried out by members of its international voluntary service corps. These are people from all walks of life and who have undertaken a full time commitment to understanding the lives of people living in poverty and supporting them in their struggle.

Since 1973, ATD Fourth World has had an official youth branch running our own European youth network, where young people from all backgrounds can meet each other and contribute to the Movement’s actions and priorities. This is done through local youth groups and clubs, summer camps, seminars, training weekends, and voluntary service programmes. All our activities are built around the active participation of young people facing poverty and exclusion in daily life.

Profile of participants

The Study Session brought together 28 participants from 12 different countries: Albania, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Of those 28 participants, 11 of them were members of ATD Fourth World, another 11 were from other youth associations in link with us through our European youth network and 6 were from youth associations whom we were not previously in contact with.

All participants were aged between 19 and 31 years (with the majority of participants falling within a core age range of 20-26) and they were all active at a local or community level; belonging to, or in touch with, voluntary or youth associations.

For the organising team, it was important to bring together a very diverse group of participants. Not only in terms of nationalities, culture and gender, but also in terms of social backgrounds. The young people who attended the session brought with them different perspectives on social justice due to their very different life experiences:

- 8 participants had direct experience of facing social injustice in their daily life (e.g. exclusion, discrimination, or other forms of social injustice). With first hand knowledge of homelessness, placement in the care system, drug and alcohol dependence and much more, these young people brought a unique understanding of the theme based on real life experience. They were able to ground our discussions in reality through giving direct and concrete examples of how social injustice actually affects people in day to day life and how they try to overcome it. This kind of contribution was important in order to prevent our discussions becoming over theoretical and to help us appreciate as a group that action to combat social injustice needs to be built in partnership with those who experience it.
- 15 participants had indirect experience through their work for social justice (i.e. in the areas of inclusion, intercultural understanding, peace etc.). Coming from different countries and being engaged in different kinds of organisations, these young people contributed their specific knowledge and experience of voluntary work in their local community. This exchange allowed participants not only to gain a broader understanding of the ways young people are socially committed in different countries and organisations, but also to really be in a position to learn from each other and to discover new ideas, new approaches and new ways of working.

- 5 participants were youth workers experienced in working with young people who faced difficult situations in their life. They are in contact with young people with the fewest opportunities at local level, on a day to day basis: available to talk to them, to listen to them, to show them that they are not alone. Their work puts them in a position to try to help young people in difficulty to face the challenges they encounter in daily life and encourage them not to give up and to have the strength to carry on. Through their knowledge and expertise the youth workers were able to help us create an atmosphere of understanding and sensitivity throughout the week. This ambiance gave every participant the security and confidence to speak in front of others and to feel free to participate fully in the week.

Such diversity made it possible to have a very enriching and interesting week together. For the participants, it was good to know that they were not alone in the problems they faced, nor in their commitment to change society for the better. Everyone involved was able to take advantage of a unique opportunity to exchange their knowledge and experience with other socially engaged young people.

The following profiles present three of the participants in order to give readers a better feeling of the mix of backgrounds present in the group.

Fabien

Fabien, 25 years old, comes from Luxembourg. He grew up with his German father, his Luxembourgish mother and his three younger sisters. Living together wasn't always very easy. His father was dependent on alcohol and the family suffered a lot.

From the age of 11, Fabien and his sisters were put into children's homes. *"I have been in four different homes, but I couldn't feel at home anywhere."* All these changes made it hard for Fabien to find friends and to build on something. He felt frustrated and alone. He didn't speak much about his problems but bottled them up instead. His frustration and anger came out through blackouts and fits of rage.

Fabien attended school until he was 14 years old. He wanted to stop because he was bullied by his classmates and had difficulties with his teachers. At 16, Fabien got into trouble and spent two years in a young offenders institute. *"For me, it was hell on earth there. Other prisoners were beating and humiliating me."*

After his release, Fabien was provided with an apartment, sharing with five other young people. It didn't work out well and he ended up on the street for two years before finding a place in a hostel.

Fabien has always wanted to find a job and get training and has had a number of different work placements: among other things, he worked with horses and in a museum. These placements weren't permanent and often he found himself back at square one having to start from the beginning again.

Thanks to the help of the social workers attached to his hostel, Fabien is now living in his own apartment and is doing forestry work. For about two years, Fabien has been involved with ATD Fourth World and is taking part in different activities. *"I go there because there are people who listen to me. I could make new friends and we are supporting each other."*

With ATD, Fabien had the possibility to go abroad and to participate in and to prepare different events like the 17th of October, the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. For this event in 2005, he spoke in front of 200 members of the public including the Duchesse of Luxembourg. Together with other young people from ATD, Fabien realises that they can contribute to something, that they can create something positive and achieve something.

Even if daily life is still full of challenges, Fabien feels more independent. For him, the most important thing is having friends and not to be alone. In the future, Fabien wishes to start a family and to find a full time job with a permanent contract to make it possible for his family to have a normal life. What he'd like most would be to work with horses or to train to become a mechanic. Another dream is a nice holiday in Mallorca. *"I hope one day, I can realise those dreams. It's hard, but if you believe in yourself and if you don't lose courage, you can succeed."*

Fjoralba

Fjoralba, 22 years old, was born in a small town in Albania. Growing up with her grandparents, she learned very early about how old cultural traditions influence their way of living and thinking affecting every part of their daily life. Since finishing high school in Tirana, Fjoralba has been studying economics at university.

In order to meet people and make new friends, Fjoralba started to get involved in different voluntary activities: she helped to coordinate social events in high school; took part in a project to help young people having problems at home, school and in their community; supported women by informing them about their rights; and worked in a youth education, information and resource centre.

After several years of volunteering, her perspective began to change. Fjoralba realized that her commitment is not only about her social life. *"I realised that I can do something important with my free time and feel good with that. Helping people is my new target in life. And after that I thought*

that if people work together for a better society they can make this dream come true. This has made me realise that now I am working for something that is bigger than me."

In future, Fjoralba wants to finish university and deepen her social engagement in her organization. She also would like to have more interactive experience with other countries.

Jon

Jon is 19 and was born in a suburb of London, where he grew up with his two older brothers in quite a multicultural Street with families from Poland, China, Ireland, Italy and Mauritius.

After passing his end of school exams he started work at a carpentry workshop and also going part time to collage to get formal qualifications in carpentry. *"It was a good opportunity and I was lucky, the job was very specialised in an industry which was quite small. It taught me about real life."* He left this job because he wanted to use his skills to work with people.

Jon started with fulltime ATD Fourth World in September 2005 as part of their voluntary service programme. He is part of a team running residential respite breaks for families in crisis at Frimhurst, a family centre in Surrey owned by ATD Fourth World. Families coming to Frimhurst are living in long-term poverty and can be in extremely difficult situations where family life is very hard. At Frimhurst, the job of the team is to provide support and understanding, as well as organising family activities, allowing families to have a genuine break from the stress of daily life and hopefully finding new strength and courage to take back with them. Jon works a lot with the teenagers who come there with their families, organising activities for them but also just being there if they want to talk about what they are going through.

"I feel voluntary work is important to be able to share your ideas, to work and learn together and respect one another. Also, not to think that the only benefit of work is money. It is a personal choice you make in your life, which means there is a level of commitment and motivation to do something."

Aims and objectives

Our overall goal was to build the study session upon the successful and active participation of young people in social difficulty. Over the course of the preparation meetings of our organising team, we identified and went deeper into the aims and objectives behind the Study Session. These are explained below:

Aim 1: To build a strong group feeling

The Study Session should be a week where participants would have the possibility to get to know one another, to meet new people and to make new friends. It was important to find different ways for participants to interact and to create a group of which everyone could feel a part and where each person could find their place. The unique diversity of the group, not only in terms of nationalities, but also in terms of backgrounds, made it even more important and at the same time also more difficult to create a sense of solidarity, togetherness and common ground. So, the success of the week was strongly dependent on how quickly a group identity could be built and on how quickly an atmosphere of solidarity, understanding and mutual respect could be created.

In order to achieve this aim the following objectives were identified:

➤ *Ice-Breaking and Group-Building activities*

A broad range of activities using different methods and approaches allowed participants to get to know each other better and to find out more about each other's culture, character, interests and social life.

➤ *Sharing experiences*

Participants should not only have the possibility to present and to explain the work of their organisations, but also to find out more about each other's personal commitment through sharing what they themselves are actually doing in their organisations, why they are involved and what effect it has had on them and their outlook on society. This exchange needed to be equal, and open, so that everybody would feel free and comfortable to talk about what he has experienced. As a result of this dialogue, we wanted a positive group identity to emerge; one which each participant could identify themselves with, no matter what their background or what difficulties they face, e.g. young people fighting for social justice.

➤ *Space for social time*

An important part of the session was also the social time. On the one hand, participants should have the chance to pass free time together, to talk about other things and to have fun together independently from

the theme of the Study Session. But on the other hand, this part of the session was also very important for creating and taking personal space. It was obvious that the week was going to be intense and demanding, not only the discussion around the subject itself, but also the fact that communication within the group could be limited due to language barriers. Social time was therefore vital in order to keep a balance; to give participants the possibility to feel free, to take some time for themselves. We also wanted to support group building through structured social events. It can be hard for some young people, particularly if they are from vulnerable backgrounds, to integrate and to find their place, and they can feel lost in free time. Social events should create a common feeling and experience where everybody can feel they have been part of something special.

Aim 2: To explore the theme

Europe is changing more and more and becoming increasingly diverse. People, especially young people, are moving to discover new countries, traditions and cultures. Other people are forced to move, to find a job and to make some money to support their family, both within Europe and to Europe from other countries.

This rich variety of cultures creates a lot of new opportunities; it broadens our outlook and makes us more resourceful and dynamic. At the same time, this development also implies challenges for society to face, like for example, the danger of new divisions and misunderstanding. Not only the European institutions, but also many of Europe citizens are striving to make Europe more united, to engender a greater feeling of community and togetherness. We were bringing together young people from different European countries so that we could think together about social justice and social cohesion, especially in considering what we have in common, but also, how things can be very different in different parts of Europe. Through our discussions and exploration of the theme, it was our aim to give participants the opportunity to place their commitment and action in a broader European context.

Social justice can contain a lot of different issues (e.g. equality, discrimination, exclusion/inclusion etc.) which affect young people in daily life. It is an “umbrella concept” and we wanted participants to be able to talk very freely about social justice, about what they’ve experienced in this area and what they understand by the term. We wanted to build our exploration of the theme on this exchange.

Social cohesion is one of the priority policy concepts of the Council of Europe. We didn’t expect the participants to come with a lot of explicit knowledge in this area, because it is a very vague and perhaps poorly understood, expression. We wanted participants to find out more about social cohesion

and to consider together about what it means, how it is in link with social justice and how we can build a more socially cohesive Europe.

In order to achieve this aim the following objectives were identified:

➤ *Building on the knowledge of participants*

As the young people who came to this session differed in their nationalities, cultural values, educational backgrounds, prior life experiences and areas of involvement, they were bringing with them different perspectives and understanding of the theme. This diversity made it possible to get a very broad and open view. For us, the participant's knowledge was the most important tool to use in order to explore the theme.

➤ *Exploring social justice*

We wanted to explore social justice using different approaches. Participants undoubtedly had their own understanding and view and could give concrete examples through their life experiences. By allowing them to compare their own understanding with other points of view, we wanted to try to create a common conception on which we could then build on. We also needed to give participants the opportunity to appreciate the perspective, understanding and action of the Council of Europe in this area.

➤ *Exploring social cohesion*

As we have already pointed out, social cohesion is a very “big” word and it was clear that the participants probably wouldn't know as much about it as they did about social justice. We wanted to take an alternative approach and reflect on external inputs to get a clearer view of what social cohesion is about. We invited an expert from ATD Fourth World, Sarah Welford, to give an input on her personal point of view about social cohesion as well as Michaël Guet, an expert from the Council of Europe, who talked about the situation of the Roma and the action of the COE in supporting their struggle. Michèle Akip, also from the Council of Europe, presented the strategy of social cohesion of the Council of Europe in a very concrete way, by making links between the political ideals that drive the institution in this policy domain and the challenges experienced by young people in Europe. We also showed the film “*La haine*” which dealt with the situation of young second generation immigrants living in a cité in Paris. Participants gained a broad view about social cohesion, so that they could develop their own points of view and their own conclusions.

➤ *Exploring the social situation and role of young people as active European citizens*

In order to place the theme in a bigger picture and to compare and contrast the difficulties young people have to face in Europe, we asked

some participants to prepare inputs about the situation and role of young people in their country. We thought it was extremely important for the participants to find out what's happening in other countries and what young people have to handle across Europe. We also wanted them to consider their own role as a new generation in making the values of the European project, whether consciously or not, a reality on the ground. This provided the basis for our final aim.

Aim 3: Networking and Multiplying

Finally, after building a group with a sense of solidarity, a group where everyone would hopefully get to know each other better and forge a common understanding of the issues concerning themselves, their countries and Europe, we wanted to continue beyond the Session. It's important that participants could stay in contact with each other, not forget what was mentioned and discussed, or what they got out of the week.

The mutual support and strength participants give to each other during an intensive week like this is something that helps them go further in their social commitment. A Session, like this, should only be the beginning of cooperation between young people from different parts of Europe.

The young people attending the session should also be able to act as multipliers at local and regional level afterwards. Not everybody has the possibility to take part in international events and meetings like study sessions, so it's very important that participants are ready to share their learning experience and knowledge with their peers after their return.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following methodologies were used:

➤ *Providing open space*

For us, it was very important to think about ways to follow up and to be able to continue to network in future together, despite the distance between our countries and backgrounds. But in fact, this cooperation depends mainly on the participants taking responsibility themselves. We decided to use a form of open space methodology which will be explained in more details in the second part. The open space was meant to give the participants the possibility to decide what they are going to do and how they are going to continue. If they missed something during the week, or if there was something they wanted to discuss further and deeper, they could do it during the open space. They could come together themselves and think about how they want to carry on. It was here that we wanted to give participants the chance to think about potential future projects and to start to share ideas about working with various target groups and social justice issues.

➤ *Evaluation and feedback*

At the end of a session like this, it is necessary to evaluate together with participants in order to get an impression of their thoughts, feelings and conclusions about the week. They should get the chance to say honestly what they appreciated and what they would have liked to have been done differently. And also just to say how they feel emotionally after such an intense week. We provided different tools like writing, painting, photo collage etc. to help participants to express themselves. ATD Fourth World's international youth team, who organised the event, will stay in contact with participants through visits to share news and will try to support any initiatives. They will try to integrate participants of the Study Session further into their existing European youth network.

The challenge of meeting our aims

These were ambitious aims that were not going to be easy to reach. The very diversity of the group represented a challenge. Apart from differences of culture and geography, participants also differed greatly in their life experience and particularly in their educational backgrounds and language skills. Some participants had not completed their basic schooling whilst others had studied to degree level and beyond. A number of participants had had significant difficulties at school and due to these negative experiences they lacked confidence and felt anxious in educational settings. Some also had not had the means or the opportunity to learn a second language. The broad scope of the subject matter and the distance between the grass roots action of the participants and the institutional reality of the European project represented two more intrinsic difficulties.

In order to meet our aims, we had to create an environment that would enable very different participants to meet one another and then to learn and think together. In planning for the Study Session, we strove to blend elements of non-formal education with the experience of ATD Fourth World in bringing together young people from different social backgrounds around the struggle of the most excluded. The following lists some of the specific challenges we identified prior to the Study Session and which we wanted to overcome:

➤ **Showing sensitivity and respect towards one another**

The success of the session depended very strongly on the feeling of the participants, to feel free enough to speak about their personal experiences and engagements. We always had to be conscious of the fact that some of the young people participating in the Study Session were from vulnerable background and could have difficulty dealing with their emotions or be particularly sensitive when discussing certain issues which they may have had direct and painful experience of themselves. Participants from other backgrounds could possibly be unaware of this and through their ignorance cause misunderstandings, upset or conflict. It was important to create an atmosphere where everyone felt accepted and was able to learn and share knowledge and experience in a mutual environment. The organising team, which included several experienced youth workers, realized that they had to be there to provide support or help if anyone seemed uncomfortable with the way an exchange or debate was developing.

➤ **Communication**

Although the main working languages were English and French, a lot of young people depended on translation in their native language, particularly those who had grown up in difficult situations, because they didn't have the means or possibility to learn foreign languages at school. It was the overall goal of our Study Session to bring together young people experiencing social disadvantage with young people

from other backgrounds in order to create an exchange between them which could support and inform everyone's contribution to the development of their communities and societies. We knew that we were taking a risk and that it would be difficult for some participants to integrate without being able to speak to each other. But we were counting on the participants as well as members of the organising team with the necessary language skills to make an effort to help everybody to overcome this barrier and feel part of something bigger.

➤ **Keeping our feet on the ground**

We wanted to help participants to not only share their personal experiences and knowledge, but also to think in general terms about social justice and social cohesion. Some participants were more experienced than others in thinking conceptually and we wanted to make sure that discussions did not become too abstract and were regularly grounded in everyday examples and focused on what was really important – the concrete results of our personal values, beliefs and commitment in real life.

➤ **Self expression**

It was important to provide a variety of different tools, techniques and approaches to enable everyone to feel encouraged, at ease and able to find a way to express their thoughts, feelings and views during the week. We wanted to use the following methods and media: video work; film; drawing; painting and collage; writing; oral presentations; screen projections; small group work; visual aids; debate and discussion in small groups and plenary; as well as physical activities.

➤ **Flexibility**

As the achievement of our learning objectives was mainly based on the participants' experience and active involvement, the program of the session stayed very flexible. We didn't plan everything in detail from the beginning on to be able to change things if needed. We wanted to be aware of, and respond to, how participants would react to the activities. We also wanted to remain sensitive and alert to the needs and reactions of the group, which meant that it was important to have a facilitation team of mixed talent, nationalities and gender.

Preparing with participants

The participation of young people with the fewest opportunities can not be taken for granted. Young people disadvantaged by persistent poverty or long-term exclusion must overcome many obstacles in order to participate in events like this. These barriers range from the practical to the personal and the psychological.

Many young people in these situations have never travelled significant distances; sometimes they have never left their town or the area around their village. Travelling alone or taking a plane when you have never done that before can be very daunting. Others will be unsure about meeting new people, afraid that they will be misunderstood and will not fit in because of the way they talk or the way they look. Some will have difficulty imagining what a study session is all about and be concerned in case it will be like school, where they may have had a bad time. And for many, day to day life is a struggle with regular crises which mean that their participation can be in jeopardy suddenly and unexpectedly.

For example, one participant dropped out of our study session at the last minute due to the fact that he was made homeless, even though after some days he was able to find a temporary solution he was no longer in the right state of mind to participate. Another young person due to attend the study session was given a non negotiable appointment with the employment service at the same time as the session would be taking part. He was, however happy and wanted to attend because he had been trying for some time to find work.

In some European countries, unemployed young people can lose their social security benefits if they are not available for work or actively searching for a job. Even when we offer to write to the social security office to explain the benefits to young people of participating in an event like a study session, some young people tell us that they don't want us to do it because they fear creating trouble for themselves; if things went wrong they could end up with no income for weeks or months. Several times, young people living in hostel accommodation have not been able to participate in events in case they lose their place in the hostel and end up back on the streets.

Barriers like these make it very difficult for some young people to take part in events even when they have been asked. For the organising team, it was vital that every young person from a disadvantaged background who took part had access to concrete support, from people in their association or from a youth worker or other social care professional, prior to and after the study session.

After this, we realised that it would be important to try and visit some of these young people where they were and support their preparation with other

young people in their association or youth group. In the months leading up to the start of the study session, members of the organising team travelled to Luxembourg, Arnhem in the Netherlands and Neudorf in East Germany to this end. These visits were important not only as a way of preparing young people to think about the theme of the session in advance, but also to answer questions and give reassurance about all sorts of things that may have been worrying them. The fact that some participants could meet us before, in this way, meant that they could go to Strasbourg already knowing someone from the team, meaning that it was not completely a step in the dark.

It was also an aim of the study session to have more in depth inputs and presentations from some participants as part of the programme. We decided to try and do this because we knew that participants were coming with a lot of experience of the issues and that it was a way of acknowledging this and building wider ownership of the session. Members of the organising team visited participants in Lille and Warsaw in order to think with participants from France and Poland about how they could present the social situation of young people in their countries.

It is also worth pointing out that this study session was part of a series of different international events and occasions over the last 4 years, which has helped to build ATD fourth World's youth network in Europe. Whenever we organise such events, we are trying to bring in young people who have not had any international experience with us but, at the same time, to make sure there are also participants coming for the second or third time. The Friendship that is built up during events like these is the basis for keeping our network alive. For young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, having already taken part in some smaller meetings and knowing that they will see the friends they made last time again is very important in overcoming fears about participating in a new and larger event. This is why "participation" is not a short-term goal but about a long-term commitment to believing in, and being alongside, vulnerable young people.

Programme Making a stand for social justice! ATD Fourth World study session, 7 - 14 May, EYC Strasbourg

Sun 7th Mon 8th Tue 9th Wedn 10th Thurs 11th Fri 12th Sat 13th Sun 14th

breakfast 8.00 - 9.00

plenary: welcome word, introducing the team, aims and objectives, the week's programme

small groups: What we do to promote social justice?

plenary: social justice and social cohesion

small groups: examining social cohesion « La Haine »

plenary: social situation of young people in Europe two examples

plenary: review of the week

departure

arrival

plenary: introducing the Council of Europe and EYC

Discussion

group exercise

plenary: group discussion

Break 10.30 - 10.45

plenary: introducing ATD Fourth World

small groups: what we do to promote social justice?

Exercise

plenary: social cohesion and the Council of Europe followed by questions from the group

plenary: Group discussion

small groups: what can young people do to promote Social Cohesion?

creative workshops: what did I get out of the week?

Lunch 12.30 -14.00

small groups/ plenary: exploring our expectations towards the study session and our week together

small groups: what motivates us, what are the values behind our action ? **Discussion & Exercise**

plenary: ATD Fourth World and social cohesion followed by questions from the group

group visit to the Council of Europe

open space preparation

small groups: evaluating the study session and our week together

Break 16.00 - 16.15

group building exercise

Intercultural evening: preparation

group building through sport

free afternoon

open space: upcoming events, future projects - how young people can contribute to positive change!

concluding the week and preparing for the farewell party

free time 18.00 - 19.00

dinner 19.00 - 20.00

Dinner in town

welcome organisation evening market

intercultural evening

free afternoon

farewell party

end of organised activities 22.00

Outcomes: building a strong group feeling

We could not begin to speak about our ideas and realities regarding Social Justice and Social Cohesion without sharing our experiences, and before this, without getting to know each other better and agreeing to work together as a group. As some participants have been in link with ATD Fourth World or with our European youth network before, a number of them already knew each other through attending some earlier events. Influenced by this fact, the group atmosphere was more positive and relaxed from the beginning on. But at the same time we had to be careful not to forget those who were in a completely new environment without knowing anybody. We wanted everyone to contribute and nobody to be left behind. In order to build together an autonomous and supportive group, despite its diversity, we had to create a number of occasions that would gradually help us have the trust and confidence to be at ease.

Ice-Breaking and Group-Building activities

Breaking the ice

A number of different activities were arranged to help people to introduce themselves to one another. Especially in the first half of the Session, we placed a high value on this and played some well known name learning games.

Later in the week, some participants, using their own experience and knowledge gained through their involvement in their organisations, were offering to animate some energising activities themselves. These short games not only allowed participants to find out more about each other, it also helped, particularly during plenary sessions, to gain new energy and strength and to create a relaxed atmosphere within the group. And the fact that suggestions were coming from within the group meant that the participants were feeling comfortable with this approach and were taking ownership. These types of activity are always better when they are resulting from a spontaneous and positive energy in the group and not being forced upon unwilling participants.

Group building exercise

In order to help us build a group feeling and to reflect on being a group and supporting one another, we used an exercise called "Cooperation-eggs", which involved the group forming teams to co-operate with one another in order to achieve a specific task. After the exercise we discussed what had happened in each small group. The concrete steps and outcomes are explained below.

Description

The group was divided into small teams composed of 7 young people. Each group was confronted with the following task: an egg hangs under the ceiling in a little basket. The team has 20 minutes to plan and to build a construction which can take the egg from the ceiling down to the floor without breaking the egg. They can use all sorts of materials: newspapers; sticky tape; string; blankets; chairs; balloons etc. but they are not allowed to handle the egg themselves.

Outcome

Nearly all the groups managed to build a construction which was reliable enough to fulfil the task. In the debriefing, participants had the possibility to reflect on their behaviour and the course during the activity.

Many participants noted that during such games, you can see easily who likes to be in a "leader position" and who is shyer and therefore you can discover each others character very quickly. But they all agreed, no matter if there are leaders in the group or not, it is important that everybody has the chance to contribute to the planning stage and that the group should be able to listen to each other and be willing to make compromises. For them, success depended strongly on group work and the group work, for its part, depended on every participant's effort to achieve something together. There was agreement that only with the support of the whole group were they able to manage the task.

Exploring hopes and fears

Description

We wanted to reveal and appreciate our concerns and expectations for the Study Session and finally, once aware of them, think about how we could imagine working together. We started this process by meeting in small groups in order to share more easily our personal reflections and to compare them with each other. Afterwards, participants were invited to come together in plenary to present their work to the whole group. This exercise was a necessary step in creating a supportive working atmosphere where everybody could be more aware of each other's personal insecurities and ambitions for the week.

Outcome

One group of concerns related to the desired content of the Study Session: discovering each other's organisations and involvement in them; learning new methods in order to be able to go further in our own action in the future; sharing experiences and ideas; getting new inspiration and motivation; finding out what social justice and cohesion is all about; finding solutions to social problems; networking; getting to know the Council of Europe's work; and related fears like boredom and not having enough time to do everything

they wanted to do, or worries about not being able to keep up or make a contribution.

A large number of comments described the group that we should all aspire to build: getting to know other people and making new contacts and friends; having fun with each other; a genuine encounter between participants; having a sense of solidarity, understanding and togetherness. Some people were afraid of the fact that the remarkable diversity and mixture in terms of different countries as well as different backgrounds within the group could result in linguistic or cultural barriers causing misunderstanding between participants. They also pointed out the danger that little cliques could emerge and stick together and that we might have difficulties to build one common group feeling where nobody is excluded or gets left out. As young people, they were conscious of the fact that they needed to help themselves to integrate and involve everybody in order to create one mutual group; they recognised that it was not only the task of the facilitation team but everyone's responsibility.

Finally, participants presented how we could work and live together: helping each other; believing in each other; being interested in other participants; asking for help for translation; being tolerant; making efforts to communicate; taking responsibility; showing appreciation; being attentive and patient.

These results showed that the group as a whole was very aware how challenging this session was going to be but were ready to take up the challenge.

Sharing experiences

Organisation market - Description

We wanted to find out more about the different organisations we represented. For the organisation market, each participant prepared a stand of his or her organisation or projects that they are involved in. The preparation time was a very important part of this activity; participants had the time to think by themselves how they were going to present their organisation in a creative way, something important in itself as it gave the chance for people to express themselves in different ways and not only by speaking. Each stand displayed info materials (leaflets, videos, photo albums) brought by participants – they could also use on hand materials to create their own posters. Everyone was invited to circulate freely in the hall and ask questions.

Outcome

Most participants were very creative in designing their own posters using materials provided by the Youth Centre. The ambiance was very relaxed, so that everybody felt comfortable and free enough to take time and to shape his stand. The results were great – always fun, informative and interesting (see page 42 for a full list of participants and their organisations).

Social justice tree - Description

This activity involved splitting the participants into small groups with the task of creating a tree which describes their action and involvement in their organisation, their ideas and understanding about social justice and their motivation behind their actions. In order to facilitate the discussion and the task, the organising team provided the following list of questions:

- *Leaves and Branches: actions and activities*
 - How are you involved in your organisation?
 - What kind of activities do you take part in?
 - What kind of issues, problems do these activities address?
 - Why are these activities important?

- *Trunk: Social justice ideas and realities*
 - Can you give any examples of social injustice?
 - What does social justice mean to you?

- *Roots: personal motivations and commitment*
 - Why are you committed to your association and its work?
 - Why did you become involved?
 - What motivates you?

When the groups reconvened, two volunteers from each were asked to present and explain their "social-justice-tree" in plenary. After finishing this exercise, time was given to discussing and comparing together the different trees and any other feedback from the small groups.

Outcome

The concept of the tree was very clear and graphic, it helped the group to understand better the context and connections between their actions, motivations and the theme of social justice, and also to see how different or similar others think and act in these areas.

The following summarises the main points to come out of this exercise:

On participants' actions:

- *Raising public awareness*

Some of the participants were involved in different projects to raise awareness of certain issues or values in society: promotion of human rights like the convention on the right of the child; changing public perception about marginalised young people through public events like 17th October (United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty); and campaigning activities against racism and intolerance etc.

➤ *Providing support*

Young people in difficulty are more than just the problems they face. Many participants are trying to look behind those problems and to give support in order to encourage vulnerable youth to go forward in their lives. Among other things, some participants are involved in special training for young people to gain life skills and to help them with studying and managing their daily lives through high school counselling; through psychological support; through youth groups or women's groups; and through health support at a centre for young people with drug and alcohol problems etc.

➤ *Offering cultural, creative and sporting activities*

The group underlined the importance of having regular activities for young people in order to give them possibilities to express themselves, to learn new things, to find out their talents and deepen them, and to have fun and to get to know other people. Some of the activities given were: street libraries where volunteers read with children in poor neighbourhoods; TAPORI, a global network of children linked by a newsletter which offers information on different projects and allows children to communicate all over the world; sports; organising concerts; making music or movies; making tables or toys out of wood; sharing leisure time together (pool, bowling etc.); offering projects like "My-own-little-poetry-project" which enables young people to express themselves. Many of these projects were initiated and led by young people themselves.

➤ *Developing understanding, solidarity and friendship*

Participants are also engaged in projects to bring young people together and to make them feel welcome. Some examples included: building trust and friendship between young people from different social backgrounds and European countries through summer camp projects; Respiro Familia, a project in Spain bringing together disadvantaged families around mutual support and collective expression; work in a respite centre in England which offers a break and understanding to families in poverty; home visits to families in crisis to listen to them and to offer support; bringing together children, young people and older people to aid and improve intergenerational understanding and dialogue etc.

On participants' understanding of social justice:

➤ *Equality and human rights*

Examples included: "everyone should have the same chances and opportunities in life, no matter where you come from or which background you have"; "the right to work; access to information and education"; "the need to have enough money to live a normal life".

- *Human dignity and combating discrimination*
Examples included: “to be respected as a person”; “to feel that you do have worth”; “to feel important”; “to feel secure”; “no sexism”; “no economic, religious, racial or cultural discrimination”; “no prejudices”.
- *Togetherness and community spirit*
Examples included: “more us, less me”; “to feel part of society”; “more solidarity”; “taking responsibility for each other”.

On participants' motivations:

- *To do something for yourself*
Examples included: “to make new friends; to work in a community, in a team”; “to discover the world and other cultures”; “to discover ourselves and our skills when we meet with other people”; “to give a meaning to our lives”; “to find peace within ourselves and to be happy.”
- *To help other people*
Examples included: “to do things with others not for them, but with them”; “to show that you are not alone”; “to go further together”; “to give back what you've received.”
- *To change something*
Examples included: “to build in future a better world for all of us”; “to create a more caring society for future generations”.

In the discussion afterwards, participants discovered that, although every small group worked and discussed on their own, the different “social-justice-trees” were very similar in terms of their content regarding their activities, ideas about social justice and personal motivations. A participant from Russia commented after the presentation: “Although we worked in different groups there were similar things that we concluded at the end. And we are all working with children and youth and we are all actually probably doing the same thing, in different countries. So, I think that social justice is a concept or a notion which is understandable for everybody no matter which country or continent you live in.”

This exercise also helped participants to understand better, through their own experiences and ideas, what social justice is about. Gita from Latvia said: “At the beginning, social justice was for me something big. It was like: what is that? But now we put it into some smaller things and I’m starting to understand and that we need to think more about us and not about me.”

Small group work

In order to enable the participants to express themselves in more intimate environment than in plenary, and to have more time to talk and to discuss, the small group work was a vital method, which we used a lot during the week. Small group work typically involved one hour or more at a time and was facilitated in such a way that everyone was encouraged, and had the chance, to speak. We also encouraged the group to feel free to use any location, inside or outside the building. The atmosphere created in small groups was instrumental in helping the participants to talk more freely and be relaxed in front of others. There is a big difference between talking through a microphone in front of 30 other young people or talking somewhere outside sitting on the grass in front of 5 other young people. For that, we were very lucky for the flexibility of our professional translating team. They were very understanding about the needs of the group and helped us to overcome our language barriers. Thanks to them we were able to form small groups working in two different languages. During the week, we mixed the small groups two or three times so that participants did not always have to work together with the same people and could get to know better some of the others. The small groups even supported the creation of a common whole group feeling, because everyone had the possibility to interact with others, to integrate in a new group and to make a contribution.

Space for social time

Intercultural evening - Description

The intercultural evening was designed for participants to get to know better each other's country, culture and traditions in a different way as well as to pass some free-time together, to have fun with each other and to relax. The participants' task was to play a sketch, preferably but not necessarily in a funny style, referring to their country as part of a cabaret style show. The form their act took was up to them.

From the beginning on, each delegation took their task seriously, even though they had to use their free time to prepare. We already mentioned the show and the task in the information letter sent out a few weeks before the session, so that they had the possibility to prepare in advance. Participants from the same countries formed delegations and prepared together a special act for the evening. The preparation was a very important part of the intercultural evening: while taking their time, discussing with others what to do, trying to find creative ideas and finally preparing the act itself, participants already created a very co-operative atmosphere and gave the impression that the intercultural evening was going to be a very special event. The organising team was there to provide materials and help in case it was needed. To give them more motivation, this event took the form of a friendly competition between the different countries, called "The Crazy Show". After every presentation, they had the possibility to vote through throwing a certain

number of sweets in a basket, which was circulating, the more sweets the better for the presented country.

Outcome

During this evening, there was an impressive atmosphere of mutual respect towards each delegation. The acts themselves were very diverse and creative: mimes, sketches, animations, games, dances, songs and a lot more were presented.

This evening, right at the beginning of the session, really brought everyone together and was also great fun.

Free time

The organising team was conscious of the fact that participants needed their free-time in order to be able to give their best. We were organising our breaks in accordance to the feeling of participants, the sensitivity of the issues being discussed and the concentration demanded during some plenary sessions. We wanted everybody to have enough time to relax and to take a deep breath. The group was also encouraged to say how they felt in this regard, and to draw our attention to the situation if we were getting the balance wrong. The majority of the group was spending their free evenings in the centre of the city. The few people left in the European Youth Centre who didn't want to go out weren't happy with the fact that there was no alternative provided for them. We agreed that it would have been maybe better to arrange something for those who stayed behind. However it was clear that the team and also the participants were at their limit in terms of "organised" events.

Outcomes: exploring the themes

In building the group we had already started exploring the theme of social justice and build our own common understanding of it. Through the social justice tree exercise, we had many of the participants' thoughts about the kind of examples and concepts that were linked to social justice. These could be grouped into 3 areas:

- *Social inclusion and solidarity*
 - Be part of the community
 - To face together obstacles in life
 - More "us", less me, more solidarity
 - Lack of social mixing in our neighbourhoods and school. People are enclosed in their ghetto of origin and culture.
 - People are more than problems, they can contribute themselves

- *Respect of human rights and human dignity*
 - Access to basic necessities for all?
 - What are basic necessities? (We need more than house, food. We also need access to culture, to have fun together, to live life)
 - Same rights for everyone
 - No hierarchy, be recognised as a person as important as anyone else
 - Feel like a human being
 - Respect for all no matter what their situation

- *Equal opportunities and tolerance*
 - No sexism, no racism
 - Be open minded
 - Social injustice is caused by people judging others without knowing them (we can all be guilty of this)
 - Equal rules for everyone
 - Same chances in life for everyone (training, work, education)

Expert inputs

We invited three speakers to address participants in a formal setting and deliver expert input on Wednesday 10th (see programme). This was preceded by some feedback in plenary about our common understanding of social justice and then a more non-formal exercise.

The Quote game – Description

This was a game where the participants were divided into two groups and each group were read the quotations and after each one they were encouraged to run to different corners of the room according to whether they agreed or not and then say why. Some of the quotations used were:

"Justice is whatever the strongest decides it should be."

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

"Those who commit injustice bear the greatest burden."

"It is better that ten guilty persons escape, than that one innocent suffer."

"A personal injustice is stronger motivation than any instinct for philanthropy"

"Punishment is justice for the unjust."

"Rather suffer an injustice than commit one."

"The love of Justice in most men is simply the fear of suffering Injustice."

The game was well received and inspired an open space workshop later in the week.

Guest Speakers

The first guest speaker was Michèle Akip, Co-Secretary to the European Committee for Social Cohesion in the Council of Europe. She presented the social cohesion strategy of the Council of Europe and linked it with the current challenges experienced by young people in Europe. She introduced the political ideals that drive the Council of Europe in this policy domain, such as the promotion of human rights and fighting social and economic inequality. She also spoke about the necessity of different social partners coming together to make practical change possible including governments, businesses, trade unions, NGO's and ordinary citizens. Last, she presented some of the mechanisms that the Council of Europe had brought into being to promote social cohesion, such as the possibility for some NGO's to lodge collective complaints of violation of the European Social Charter.

Michaël Guet, who is Head of Roma and Travellers Division (DG III Social Cohesion), spoke about some of the practical initiatives that the Council of Europe has undertaken over the last 10 – 15 years in trying to protect the rights of one of Europe's largest minorities. The Roma and Traveller population number between 12 and 14 million and suffer such serious discrimination in many countries that they are effectively denied proper access to mainstream education and employment. They have also been subject, as an ethnic group, to other dramatic human rights abuses. Michaël informed us that the European Court of Human Rights has officially recognised this discrimination and that the Council of Europe is lobbying many member states with large Roma populations to adopt a strategy to challenge and change this. The Council of Europe is also able to bring together many different actors, such as

representatives of NGO's working with Roma, as well as many Roma themselves, in order to reflect on Roma issues.

Sarah Welford, gave a personal account of what social cohesion meant to her through her work as a fulltime volunteer with ATD Fourth World. She suggested that there is a lack of cohesion in many western European countries due to apathy and a lack of interest in each other as neighbours and members of a shared community. This was maybe due to insecurity or maybe too much security and feelings of social self sufficiency. However, Sarah then went on to point out the most vulnerable members of our society are hurt the most by such attitudes. Ignorance and self interest leads to a lack of understanding and discrimination towards people who live differently to us and who may not be as strong.

All three talks generated a lot of questions and took participants into the heart of the study session's theme.

Film – La Haine

On Thursday morning the group was split into 3 groups in order to watch the film "La Haine" together in different language and subtitled versions. After watching the film, participants were encouraged to reflect on it in their viewing groups and then share some of their thoughts in plenary. The film, which is very powerful, was chosen in order to give another kind of perspective on the themes of social justice and social cohesion and to spark debate amongst the group, especially due to its parallels with recent (November 2005) rioting by young people in the French cités.

Film synopsis

La Haine ("Hate") is a French black and white film directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, released in 1995. It is a dark urban thriller which has been called France's answer to *Do the Right Thing*. It explores themes of racism, violence and disaffected youth in modern suburban Paris. A riot has broken out in a suburban ghetto, and been quelled by the police. The film depicts 24 hours in the lives of three teenage friends in that suburb.

Vinz (Vincent Cassel), who is Jewish, is filled with rage. He sees himself as a thug, modeled after Robert DeNiro's "Travis Bickle" from *Taxi Driver*. Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui), an Arab, is the trio's constantly-talking voice of reason. Hubert (Hubert Koundé), who is black, is a boxer, quietly pouring his energy into making something of himself and getting out of the ghetto. A friend of theirs, who has been beaten up in police custody, lies in a coma. Vinz finds a policeman's gun, lost in the riots that preface the film, and vows that if their friend dies from his injuries, he will use it to kill a policeman. This sets off a series of events that take the three down a path of destruction. Travelling in to central Paris from the suburbs where they live, the three friends find themselves viewed as social outsiders, and having missed the last train back

out to the projects, they are effectively locked out, in the city. Trying, unsuccessfully, to return to their home, they are obliged to sleep in a shopping centre. In the morning, they learn that their friend has died in hospital. For a moment it seems as if Vinz will go through with his boast, but backs down after a heated moment. At the end of the day when they are returning to their homes, Hubert separates from Vinz and Saïd, but is drawn back to them shortly afterwards when trouble breaks out. In the fracas, Vinz is picked up and shot by the same racist police officer he met in the preface, precipitating a last minute confrontation that ends in death and disaster for the trio.

Director Mathieu Kassovitz delivers a powerfully emotional comment on the state of French society and the problems caused by urban deprivation and its underlying causes (mainly, racism of the French police). The film was a huge commercial success and provoked much debate in France over its unflinching presentation of urban and police violence. It is said that Kassovitz based the script on the actual death of 22-year-old French Arabic Malik Ousseine, who was beaten to death by police following a 1986 university demonstration. However, in interviews Kassovitz has said that the idea came to him after a young Zairean, Makomé Bowole, was shot and killed at point blank range while in police custody and handcuffed to a radiator - the officer was reported to have been angered by Makomé's words, and had been threatening him when the gun went off accidentally. This is somewhat mirrored in the death of Vinz at the end of *La Haine*. (Synopsis provided by Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Haine).

Outcomes

The film provoked a lot of reaction amongst participants and an extended debate in plenary which covered many points. Some examples from the exchange:

"I think one of the dilemmas of these young people is that they know that nothing is ever gonna change. You see how long a day is when you haven't got anything to do. This day is probably before repeated so many times and they know that. That's the experience I made in a cité in France, people know that they never gonna have a job and that they never gonna be integrated in society. And that's why I think this continues."

"I don't know how it is in other countries. But in Slovakia it's like when somebody sees on the street some injustice to anybody, when he starts to take care and starts to help, the situation can turn against you. Do you understand? That it's maybe better not to try to do something. And the people are scared because of this."

"For me, in this film there was no cohesion. I have so many thoughts in my mind. For me it was about aggression. I think that justice and cohesion of society, it's that we offer a nice time for young people that they can do something in the place where they live. We should organise something with

them. Lots of children in Poland, especially those who live in poor environment, they don't have lots of opportunities to spend time in good places. And very often the opportunities which they have, it's drinking alcohol, taking drugs, smoking cigarettes, because they don't have any other alternatives. Society should unite in order to take care for the youngest children to give them a chance to do something better because otherwise the youngest children, they won't have these chances. They won't be able to play an important role in society when they will be adults. We shouldn't judge those because they are doing bad things. When they were children, they didn't have positive examples. We should take care for them when they are little and we should try to tell them and show them by positive examples. It's still possible to influence when they are little, in a positive way, to cooperate with them. When they are older, it's already more difficult. Before I came here, I was thinking about the meaning of the theme social cohesion and now I think that it's not about judging people, it's more about cooperating with them and we should try to get interest children with a positive way and alternatives, especially with those who have difficulties. These students with whom I work in university, they go to schools and they work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These children are a chance for those young people, to show them the positive way. I can't imagine what happened if students wouldn't go and work with them, if they wouldn't cooperate with young people. I'm really happy about that. Thank you!"

"I find it was good that the boys in the film held together. I didn't like that a lot of people in the film solved the problems with violence. At the police headquarters, they humiliated and treated the people with a form of violence as well; for example, when they tried to extort the boys. I've found that really unjust. Also with the skinheads, there were two different worlds. They didn't communicate with each other and I think we should have more understanding amongst each other that the two worlds are able to communicate."

Formal inputs from participants.

The French and Polish delegations also prepared plenary presentations on the subject of the social situation of young people in their countries. This was important to show the group that they too were experts on the theme of the session, especially on youth issues relating to social cohesion.

The French delegation's presentation centred on the difficulties of young people trying to access employment and training, both those who had failed at school and those who hadn't had gone on to get diplomas. They spoke about the rioting by disaffected youths in the suburbs of Paris and other large cities in France in November 2005. These young people had not just taken part in gratuitous violence but had tried to make their frustrations and malcontent at their situations heard by French society. However, many young French people facing similar or worse situations of exclusion to the

rioters also have the right to be heard and express their views to society. Young members of ATD Fourth World in Lille developed a questionnaire and went out to meet other young people in different places such as social centres, homeless hostels, youth clubs and on the streets. They discovered many stories of disillusionment and disaffection with the French Education and Training systems. It was also pointed out that the initial November 2005 riots were started by young people who had experienced discrimination and exclusion, even if they did not speak for everyone in that situation. However, by March 2006, it was the more privileged young students who had started protesting about their employment prospects, who had hijacked the debate but who were not representing the views of the poorest young people. The presentation went on to explain the difficulties faced by these young students, who were studying for many years and then finding that there are no graduate employment opportunities. Youth unemployment in France runs at 20% and many graduates are exploited by business and the public sector through "traineeships" on low wages which lead nowhere.

The Polish delegation gave four character sketches of representatives of different groups of young people in Poland today. The first group were the unemployed with little or no prospects, who live a hand to mouth existence taking what ever odd jobs come their way. Unemployment amongst the under 26's in Poland is as high as 40% compared to 18% for the adult population as a whole. The second group are the working poor, young people who have academic or vocational qualifications and who have chosen not to go abroad. Their income is just enough to get by, they are clients of cheap supermarkets and second-hand shops. The third group is the emigrants, perhaps one million young people have left Poland to work abroad since 2002 and 66% of Polish students wish to leave Poland to work somewhere in the EU. Some of them will emigrate for good but many will return after a year or two or after completing seasonal work. They are looking for better wages, opportunities and working conditions. The fourth group are volunteers and NGO workers. Many young Polish students work in the voluntary sector not only because they want to help others but also in order to gain skills and because their friends and families are involved too.

Outcomes: networking and multiplying

We were beginning to appreciate ourselves as Europeans and what it meant to come together as young people from so many different countries and backgrounds. Through sharing our own life experiences and knowledge, and through looking at social justice and social cohesion from several different points of view, we were gaining a clearer picture of what these expressions meant to us and what young Europeans can actually do to build a more cohesive society at the grass roots level. We were conscious that the exchange and co-operation between participants needed to continue beyond the session and wanted to support this.

Open space

Description

Open space is a non-formal methodology where responsibility for the programme, or as in this case a part of the programme, is handed over to the participants. It is designed to give them the chance to decide what they want to focus on and what they want to discuss further. The organising team deliberately placed this session in the last part of the week. If anybody felt that they had missed something during the week, if they hadn't had enough time to say what they wanted to say, or if they wanted to develop some aspects of sessions theme in a different direction, then they could do it here. They could also think about how they want to carry on and how they want to stay in contact with each other. It was up to them what they made out of this part of the programme.

In order to facilitate their task and to give some structure, the organising team made some suggestions based on the feedback we had received from participants informally or via the suggestions/feedback box. Afterwards, on their own initiative, they were free to make other suggestions and to form and join topic groups.

Participants divided themselves into 6 different topic groups and had then time to discuss and to think about how they could present their topic to the others. After this we organised three different rounds; in each round two topic groups had half an hour to present what they had done and then allow others to join in the discussion. The rest of the participants were free to circulate between these two groups.

Outcome

Everyone seemed very happy to have had the possibility to decide for themselves the topics they wanted to deepen or introduce. They took their responsibility seriously and formed 6 different topic groups. The following section gives a brief description of each group and one in depth example:

➤ *Sharing ideas for future projects*

One group consisting of participants from Poland and Spain wanted to think more about future projects. They brought up the idea to send Polish volunteers to Spain in order to prepare with Spanish volunteers an urban camp for children and also a summer exchange project, which would bring together organisations and participants from Spain, Slovakia, Poland and Germany for training on life skills.

➤ *Presentation of the 17th October* (the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty)

The participants in this group concentrated on a presentation to explain to the others what the 17th October is all about and what projects young people had already taken part in. Since 1987, on the 17th October each year (this date was officially recognised by the United Nations as an International Day in 1992), people from all walks of life who refuse to accept poverty as inevitable, join together at small and large events throughout the world. Different activities are organised to express the refusal of extreme poverty and to ensure that people who are affected directly by poverty are at the centre of the day and have the opportunity to speak out. Some of the Study Session participants showed a film about a youth march they had taken part in on 17th October 2005 in Luxembourg as part of celebrations to mark the day. Participants from Germany also presented their project for the 17th October 2006, a conference in Berlin focusing on establishing an intergenerational dialogue about the values which drive social and humanitarian commitment.

➤ *Further reflection on social justice*

One group wanted to deepen a discussion around the quote: “*Quand on naît dans l'injustice sociale on ne le sait pas tout de suite*” (When you are born into social injustice you don't realise it straight away). In order to explain this quote they prepared a mime which illustrated a situation of injustice. Afterwards they launched a discussion around the following questions:

- How can people become aware of the injustice of their situation while living it?
- Do there have to be other citizens observing this injustice in order to raise awareness of it?

➤ *Discussion around Integration and Immigration*

Immigrants often have a bad image in the countries they go to. In this group, participants talked about the situation in their countries; public perceptions, media representations, different views about integration and the realities for immigrants. Here are a few quotes to give a flavour of the discussion:

“In Brussels an atmosphere of fear exists with respect to immigrants. If something happens, the first suspect will be an immigrant.”

“At the moment there are loads of discussions about integration in Germany with two opposite side: one is saying immigrants have to pass tests about the German political system and have to adapt and the other is saying we have to do more in the field of prevention against discrimination.”

➤ *The Council of Europe's "All different, all equal" campaign*

One participant from Portugal was about to do a European voluntary service year in Luxembourg where she will be involved in this Council of Europe campaign at a national level. She used the open space as an opportunity to inform the others about this project and to find out what participants already knew about it and how different countries might be approaching the campaign.

Turning points and social networks – an open space topic group in more detail

Introduction

In this workshop we will be talking about turning points and the influence a social network has when someone encounters such a turning point. We will start with explaining what a turning point is, although most people will more or less understand the term. After this explanation the young people from JONA house will give three concrete examples of turning points that they have met during their lives and the importance their social network had during these events.

Finally we will explain the importance of turning points, within the work as it is being performed by the youth workers in JONA house.

Explanation of terminology

There are certain moments in one's life that can really change the way someone lives his life. This altering of one's life can be for the better or for the worse. We call these events that really change the way one's living his life 'turning points'.

A social network is of great importance when encountering these turning points. A good social network can support you, help you or just be there for you when you need somebody to talk to. Social networks can, on the other hand, also have a negative influence on someone's life. People can encounter the 'wrong friends', for example people that use a lot of drugs. One concrete example of a turning point is going to live in another town for studying. The whole way you are living your life will change, you will have a new place to live, you will meet new people, some will become your friends

and you won't be spending as much time with your parents anymore as you were used to.

Tamara

At the moment my family found out I was pregnant they weren't very positive about it; they thought I should have an abortion or should have the child adopted, but I thought I should take my own responsibility.

Still my real friends have always supported me, in good times but mainly during bad times. I knew the moment my daughter had been born that my life had changed completely.

I immediately started to act more as an adult and I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I haven't accomplished all the targets I wanted but I'm really getting there.

Arnoud

A big turning point in my life took place when I was living on the streets. At first my life existed mainly of smoking marijuana in coffee shops during the daytime and sleeping in homeless shelters at night. I reached a point where I realised that I couldn't go on like that. It took me a while before something really changed. This was mainly because I was having a lot of doubts. I discovered that my choice was the right one thanks to conversations I had with a good friend of mine. Not long after these conversations I went to the rehabilitation clinic.

I would like to emphasize that a good social network is of major importance. It helped me in a great way!

Marco

My mother died when I was thirteen years old, it was one of the biggest turning points in my life, I started smoking a lot of marijuana and started hanging out with 'wrong' friends. When I was seventeen years old my father died, another turning point in my life but this one changed things for the better. I started to take more responsibility in my life and now I finally have a place to live and I've got most things figured out in my life.

How we use turning points in JONA house

Young people who visit JONA house have often experienced very severe turning points. The stories from Arnoud, Marco and Tamara are just three examples. These turning points are often combined with the lack of a good social network. The friends that these young people have aren't really stimulating them to take responsibility for their own life. Very often these so called 'friends' use a lot of drugs (especially marijuana), drink a lot of alcohol and are very often unemployed. Most of the young people visiting JONA house also lack good relationships with their family. Because of these reasons it is often very difficult for them to deal with turning points in the right way.

In JONA house we try to recognise turning points in the lives of young people and we try to be there for them in good times as well as in bad times. We try to contribute to their social network to become more like a friend or a relative that is supporting them and motivating them to make the most out of their lives. It has already been mentioned some times this week, but it's important to work with young people and not for them. We try to show young people the turning points that they encounter, we try to support them during these difficult times and we try to show them solutions for their problems. We try to be role models for our visitors, that is why you encounter such a wide variety of different people in JONA House. We've got people who work there, people who live there, trainees and a lot of volunteers, all coming from different parts of society. It is important that we bring so many people together, because of this young people can really choose their 'role-model', their example, instead of just one youth worker telling them what to do with their lives.

Methodologically we try to accomplish this by working with the following four points:

- Giving a second home,
- Being there
- Motivating
- Reasonableness

Small group evaluation

Description

In order to give the participants the chance to express their feelings and to talk about their impressions regarding, on the one hand, the theme and the programme of the Study Session, and on the other hand, the building of the group and their emotional feelings, we met in small groups. It was clear that it was going to be much easier to talk about that in a more confident and comfortable atmosphere. To facilitate the discussion, every small group had drawings of all sort of different facial expressions and each group member could choose which expression best reflected how they felt and then explain why. On another paper was a tree where people could say on which part of the tree they were (either on the branch, leaves, trunk etc.). This made it easier for participants to be aware of what they actually feel and what they wanted to say and to generate discussion. After the conversations, everyone came together in plenary to give feedback from their small groups.

Outcome

The issues on which participants reflected and commented on can be divided into three different parts:

➤ *The building of the group*

Participants generally felt that a good understanding existed between them, that they knew that there were others who were listening to them

and who were really interested in them. This made it much easier for them to talk and to share experiences and ideas with each other. Others felt that it was a unique learning experience to meet so many different people from so many different countries and to be able to exchange ideas and experiences with them. For some it was nice to have had enough free time and social time together; it was a joy just to be together and to have fun with each other. Communication was a problem for some people, because there were so many different languages spoken and some participants were more reliant on translation than others and could not always talk informally with whom they wanted.

➤ *Exploring the theme*

Participants were generally happy to have had so many possibilities to share their experience and at the same time to learn from other people's experiences and knowledge. Several people commented that the remarkable diversity made it possible to have very interesting and enriching conversations and exchanges around the theme. Others highlighted the real life examples given by some participants; these were seen as very concrete, as well as strong and touching. The small group work was referred to a lot as helping participants to discuss more easily and deeply. Some people mentioned how interesting and important it was for them to learn about other organisations' work. Others felt that they now have a better picture about what social justice and social cohesion mean and how they affect society. Some participants came with the expectation to find new ways to solve difficulties. They felt disappointed in not having enough concrete solutions to social problems.

➤ *What I got out of the week*

There were also comments which described the participants' learning experience. Some said they learned a lot about themselves or they had discovered other ways of thinking through the exchange of experiences and ideas. This was because they felt they can now understand better other cultures and traditions and they had widened their horizons and looked beyond their immediate environment. Some were more optimistic for future projects because they now know that there are also others who take care about what's happening in the world, who are concerned and at the same time socially committed.

Evaluation workshops

Description

In order to give participants the possibility to express themselves in other ways, the organising team, together with participants willing to share their skills or talents, offered a selection of creative workshops like painting, writing, making film and slide shows. Everyone had the possibility to join one of these workshops, to express themselves through creative means around the

question "What did I get out of the week?". Afterwards, they had time in plenary to present what they did, if they wanted.

Outcome

The participants appreciated and enjoyed the workshops. A lot of them took their time to find out what they got out of the week and in which way they wanted to express it. Not everybody wanted to present what they had done, some things were very personal and private.

The following is a poem written by a participant from Russia during one of the workshops.

Well, here I am.

Where am I? you are going to ask me.

Can't you see me? I'm in the beams of the sun that enlightens a baby,

I'm in his happy laughing, I'm in the smiles of his parents, I'm in the happy eyes of people who believe that I really exist.

When was I born? you are going to ask me. I was for ever, even when emperors would come to power and lose it. I do my best to be with people for ever but very often, I face obstacles.

How am I doing? you are going to ask me.

Well, it depends on how I'm being treated. Very often I'm ignored, neglected and abused. But sometimes people gather together and join their efforts to help me. And I'm happy to see that there are more and more of such people.

Who am I? you are going to ask me. I think you can guess, I'm social justice and hope for the future.

Conclusion

The study session was a success on many levels; we achieved our principal aims during the week and we have already seen evidence of the kind of networking and multiplying effect that we hoped the session would generate. A number of participants have since organised summer youth exchanges between members of their respective associations. Others are now engaged in a large scale European caravan project, organised by ATD Fourth World, which is designed to promote fraternity and active citizenship

Our week in Strasbourg proved that it is possible to bring together a group of young people from extremely different social backgrounds as long as the right preparation is in place; preparation which must be based on face to face contact and human relations. It also showed that it is possible for very vulnerable young people in difficult social situations to participate at the European level and that they can make an invaluable contribution to the European "experience", as well as the European debate. Their contribution is based on an innate understanding of the spirit of the European project, of what concepts like "integration", "cohesion" and "justice" could and should actually look like in real life.

These young people need this kind of time to think and reflect on their lives together, and also with others, so that they can share what they know. Some participants were frustrated at the end of the session because they did not feel that they came away from the week with "solutions" to the problems young people face or that they face in their voluntary work for their associations and organisations. However, it is our belief that if you look at the personal testimony that you can find in the "turning points" stories from Jona Huis (p37) or in Fabien's (p9) portrait, you can appreciate that young people are not looking for solutions per se, but for the respect, friendship and encouragement that can help them to take their own steps forward in life. This is what we experienced together during the week and what we have tried to transmit through this report. And this is why youth work, carried out by young people themselves in a voluntary capacity and in a spirit of mutual benefit is so vital to the future of Europe. It can be the basis for young people to find together their own solutions, to show their best and to help build a fairer more caring Europe.

List of Participants

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Organising team and invited speakers

Course director

Tom Croft, International Movement ATD Fourth World Youth

Team members

Joseph Costang, International Movement ATD Fourth World Youth

Annemarie Wilbert, International Movement ATD Fourth World Youth

Katarzyna Nawrocka, «association»

Hanna Schofeld, Haus Neudorf

«Country»

«**First_name**»«association»*Educational advisor*

Florian Cescon, European Youth Centre

Invited speakers

Michèle Akip, Co-Secretary to the European Committee for Social Cohesion

Michaël Guet, Head of Roma and Travellers Division, DG III Social Cohesion

Sarah Welford, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Delegation to the European Union.

