

# World Forum for Democracy

## Zwolle 2015: Event Report

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The Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle, the Netherlands, hosted a parallel event during the days of the World Forum for Democracy (WfFD). This event was organised by second year students of the Windesheim Honours College. The satellite event focused on different aspects of democracy, such as human rights, interculturality, localism and migrant issues.

### Initiative:

Windesheim Honours College (WHC), under the coordination of Mr. Hems Zwier.

### Organisers:

Anne Naomi Brassien, Benita Nzanzala, Danielle Hendrikse, Johann Deidenbach, and Lara Kristin Gabe

### Speakers and Participants:

Ronald van den Hoff (founding father of Society 3.0), Gerdien Rots (party leader of the ChristenUnie in Zwolle), Thijs Harmsen (representing the NGO Right to Challenge), Wisse Kuiper (a young politician), Iris Vogt (founder of Atelier 5 4 1), Leo van Ingen (innovator and connector), Koen Bokhorst (JOVD, Dutch Organisation for Youth and Democracy), María García-Alvarez (lecturer Rhetoric WHC) and first years students of WHC.

### *Executive Summary*

The relationship between youth and democracy represented by scholars can sometimes be contradictory. However, it is time to recognize that the new generations envision democracy from a different perspective, mostly focused on a collective approach rather than an individual interest. Linked to the participation of four WHC students in the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg, a satellite event was organised by another group of student from the college. The event was hosted to critically discuss topics related to the WFD theme "Freedom vs. Control: A democratic response". The topics of discussion were focused on human rights and the challenges which democracy currently faces. The students organising the event created a diverse programme that facilitated dialogues between experts and students. How can we be prepared to adapt to the global

challenges? What is the history of human rights and how can we guarantee these for the future? What are possible solutions to the refugee crisis in Europe?

In summary, all participants could experience two days full of ideas, discussions, and debates; all related to the topic of democracy. The different activities were created in a way that it was possible to give the complex topic of *democracy* an understandable and comprehensible meaning.

The future ahead of us is only a future if we take into consideration diversity, connectivity, acceptance, dialogue, and balance between control and freedom.

### ***LAB 1: Thursday, November 19, 2015***

#### **Ronald van den Hoff – Society 3.0.**

Ronald van den Hoff, who is the founding father of Society 3.0 and a social entrepreneur, joined the first session to talk about how we can benefit of the new ways of data gathering and information sharing in order to strengthen democracy and democratic processes. Society 3.0 looks for ways and solutions to adapt to societal and global changes. It was an interesting talk about the great possibilities of a new “all connected” generation as the first step for a global democracy.

#### **Gerdien Rots – Leader ChristenUnie party in Zwolle.**

Gerdien Rots gave an insight into the history of human rights during the second session. She described the human rights as the building blocks of bridges in our current democratic systems. It was also interesting to get a perspective on intercultural approaches, and ways of vision democracy by different countries and cultures. Mrs Rots opened the debate saying that there is always more than one way of approaching and implementing democracy, since “the ways we perceive and implement our democracies do not always work for others.” Nevertheless, human rights should be maintained universally.

#### **Break and intercultural card game.**

There is always “more than one story”. This was the theme of a game awarded by the council of Europe’s “Democracy Innovation Award 2015”. Created by a Swedish team led by Seth Sellek, this powerful card game aims at fighting prejudices and connecting people with different cultural backgrounds by stimulating dialogue. Participants in this

session played the game, proving once more that it is a fun tool to awaken compassion and bring people together.



*Participants during lunch break*

### **Thijs Harmsen – Right to Challenge: Localism.**

Thijs Harmsen gave an interesting insight into his organisation, *The Right to Challenge*. It is about how citizens can take over responsibilities from their municipality and that they get in charge of their own activities and budget. This is already implemented in the UK, and Thijs and his team are now bringing it to the Netherlands. At the end of his presentation, Thijs added that fully implementing this right will take at least four more years, meaning participatory democracy is not a process that occurs from one day to the other, rather has to be seen as a long term journey. In the era of globalisation, localism will play a new role in the international arena. Going from top down initiatives to grassroots proposals, organisations will more and more decide on, and take control of the future of their own communities.

### ***LAB 2: Thursday, November 19, 2015***

#### **Panel Discussion – ‘How European democracies should deal with the current refugee situation’.**

The day ended with an intensive panel discussion moderated by Wisse Kuiper (17), a young and ambitious Dutch politician. The panel consisted of Gerdien Rots (ChristenUnie, Zwolle), Thijs Harmsen, Iris Vogt, who is the founder of Atelier 5 4 1 and a specialist in transformation, leadership, and performance, Leo van Ingen, an expert

that connects innovative ideas and initiatives from society with resources, and Koen Bokhorst, a member of the JOVD, which is a Dutch youth organisation for democracy. Between the ChristenUnie and the JOVD there were strong contradictions. The Christian norms and values were strongly focused on the ethical and humanitarian perspectives, willing to help as many as possible. On the contrary, the JOVD, a Dutch democratic youth organization, was showing more concern about the national health that would be affected by accepting too many refugees. They were a lot more reluctant to accepting (many) refugees and emphasised that governments also had their own citizens to take care of, and they had the right of priority.



*Participants of the Panel discussion*

### ***LAB 3 Friday, November 20, 2015***

The second day of the WFD, Zwolle, started off with live music and lunch. The music was performed by guitarist Richard Riemersma and singer Emma Poppink, two young professionals.

### **Rhetoric Debate of WHC first year students – Refugees: “Does Europe have a limited capacity, or do we have the responsibility to accept them?”**

The WFD Zwolle event was also embedded inside of the regular lectures at the Windesheim Honours College. Every Friday, first year students follow lessons in Rhetoric and Debate. On that day they took over the challenge of debating about the refugee issue in Europe using the debate techniques they are learning in their lessons. Two teams of students opposed each other on the topic "Refugees – does Europe have a limited capacity, or do we have the responsibility to accept them?" in front of a jury composed by students and their lecturer. Taking into consideration this was their third lesson in rhetoric, both teams surprised the audience and jury with the passion and interest they both tried to defend their main arguments. While for one team the refugees issue was merely linked to our responsibility and commitment as Europeans with Human



rights and the Geneva agreements, for the other team, the issue had other factors of impact that we could not forget: economic and cultural. The jury was not focusing in the topic itself qua content, but took into consideration the defence of the arguments using rhetoric constructions and in this case the winner team was the one defending the position of Europe should not accept them all, because of the consequences and impacts that fully open borders could have in the economy and the cultural construction of Europe. It was an interesting setting for students and audience. A clear reflection of the debate we are assisting to in the media, in the streets and in the parliaments around European countries.



*The debate of the 1<sup>st</sup> year students of WHC*

### **Iris Vogt – Democracy in organisations.**

The day ended with the guest lecture of Iris Vogt, who discussed democracy in organisations. She described how control (and freedom) affects the workplace. She talked about the concept of lean management and encouraged the audience to think about what democracy means to them, and also how they would facilitate it in an organisation. The interactive discussion with the audience concluded that there is nearly no organisation that is completely democratic. Most of the people from the audience agreed as well that they would prefer a mix between control and freedom in their professional lives.



*Presentation of Iris Vogt*

### *Learning lessons and conclusions*

“What we have learned during the two days we hosted the event, was that democracy is not static. Democracy is eclectic and it is continuously affected by societal and global changes, how Ronald van den Hoff elucidated in his lecture. We also got new insights into how differently people interpret democratic topics, issues and responsibilities associated therewith, based on their backgrounds and political alignment. We got especially aware of this during the panel discussion, as participants had opposing positions on the responsibilities of the Dutch constitutional democracy. The current refugee challenges, terrorist attacks, new technologies and the changing labour market – we perceived that all of these topics are strongly related to democracy, and our Western way of interpretation. Especially during a debate of young students about the refugee challenges, we learned how involved a lot of young people are, and how passionately they can debate and represent a position. We could observe how engaged and motivated they were, as well as eager in broadening their horizon. Many people are telling us that we are part of the “apathetic generation” – for us, this event was proof of the contrary. Consequently, experiencing the satellite event of the WFD gave all of us satisfaction, hope, and confidence for the future of democracy.”

*– Team BlueMotion, World Forum for Democracy Zwolle, 2015-12-03*



*Team BlueMotion from the WDF Zwolle (From the left: Lara Gabe, Anne Naomi Brassien, Johann Deidenbach, Benita Nzanzala, Daniëlle Hendrikse)*

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