

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to Belgium and very welcome to Destelheide!

It is a great honour for Destelheide and the whole of the Destelheide team to host the 8th Youth Platform of the Council of Europe.

The fact that you came here from all corners of Europe, and in such a numerous amount, proves the fact that this is an important yearly event.

Lies Jacob, our co-ordinator of the educational departement, has prepared an interesting presentation about Destelheide for you all, which is planned for later today.

Destelheide, which is located in Dworp just outside Brussels, is under the same administration as Hoge Rielen in Lichtaart, which is close to Antwerp.

Both organisations fall under the foundation Algemene Dienst voor Jeugdtoerisme, abbreviated as ADJ. This means General Service for Youth Tourism.

This foundation is an initiative of the administration of youth education of the ministry of the Flemish government and was founded on the 18th of February 1977.

The idea was that the foundation of Service for Youth Tourism would manage and initiate recreational, touristic and educational networks that would benefit and improve the infrastructure and equipment of all youth work.

It would also function as an information hub, a data system and an advisory council for everything concerning youth tourism.

This resulted in that ADJ managed the youth centre Hoge Rielen.

In 1994 ADJ took over the management of the educational centre Destelheide.

Since its foundation in 1971 Destelheide functioned as an outside service of the ministry.

Because Destelheide and the Hoge Rielen are cultural institutions of the Flemish Government, they are subject to the Treaty of Culture signed in January 1974.

This means that the government can choose between three formations of managing these institutions:

- one being self-management, assisted by an advisory council,**
- another one being managed by an association of delegates of the government involved, where the occupants are represented,**
- or the third one is that the institution may be managed by an independent association with a body of specialised individuals.**

Since its foundation until 2008 the General Service for Youth Tourism has been managed by the second formation, the so-called combined management.

The Flemish government was represented by government officials and the foundation's occupants were represented by youth work representatives selected by the Youth Council.

From September 2008 until October 2010 the Service for youth Tourism was managed according to the third formation, management only by specialised individuals. During this period the only members of the Service for Youth Tourism (ADJ) were representatives of Youth Work.

From November 2010 onwards the service for youth tourism (ADJ) is managed again according to the second combined management formation.

The representatives of the government are no longer government officials but experts appointed by the Flemish government and the youth work representatives appointed by the Youth Council. In the board is still one observer of the ministry.

The current general council of the ADJ is comprised by twelve members, with an equal division between the two parties. The board of directors is made up of eight members chosen from the general council, and is also divided equally.

Destelheide is flourishing as Lies will further explain later on the basis of numbers and statistics. This succes is down to the high performing team of Destelheide, the fruitful collaboration with our colleagues at Hoge Rielen, and thanks to the support of the general council, the board of directors, the ministry of culture, youth & media and Minister Sven Gatz and his administration.

On January first 2018 another youth accommodation will be added just 3 kilometres from here.

This domain called Hanebos will also be managed by ADJ.

The county of Flemish-Brabant will hand the Hanenbos domain over to the Flemish government.

I will then govern both, Destelheide and Hanenbos.

I am certain that in the interest of Youth and Youth Work in general, Hanenbos will soon benefit from this integration.

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To emphasise on the importance of this Youth Platform I would like to go back in history.

After the second world war, that hopelessly divided Europe, the council of Europe was founded in order to improve democracy and human rights in the whole of Europe.

Another goal was to unify the different member states by means of treaties and agreements.

The most important of these was the European treaty of Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom, and was signed by all member states.

The collaboration between the member states of Europe is founded on human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the justice system and human rights.

Today the goals of the Council of Europe are specified further as for example in 'Stimulate the cultural identity and diversity of Europe', and 'Strive for solutions to issues in the European community like discrimination of minorities, xenophobia, intolerance, environmental problems, AIDS, drugs and organised crime', and also for example 'Contributing to a democratic stability in Europe through supporting political, legislative and constitutional reforms'.

The fact that all of you, representatives of Youth Centres from all over Europe, are gathered here today, shows your interest and European awareness.

This is the perfect opportunity to reinforce contact and instigate new collaborations and projects.

That Europe is facing difficult times at the moment is obvious. Our old continent is burdened by the heavy weight of this era on its shoulders.

Terrorism, populism, fragmentation and polarisation between and within its countries, unprecedented streams of refugees of war and of the demographic explosion in Africa and the Middle East, the economic battle between the USA and China in-between which Europe got stuck, ...

It is a longue list that could make anyone feel depressed.

Initiatives like the Youth Platform will not solve these issues. However, the positive message of the European Council is based on passing on the message of the European treaty of Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom to Europe's future decision makers, namely the younger generation.

These are the young people that frequent our youth centres daily. They can work on improving the world and a better Europe in the future.

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The last thing I would like to talk about is 'The Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres'.

I am thrilled that we managed to have been awarded this label.

It is a reward for the hard work all of us do here at Destelheide on a daily basis.

I can only encourage those centres who have not been awarded this label yet, to give it a try.

Re-evaluate your organisation on the basis of the given criteria. The heavy assessment by the team of experts will give you a very thorough and transparent evaluation of your practise.

This will give you new insights that you can learn from, and it will stimulate the organisation to move forward in its organisational skills and at the same time in its content.

Destelheide and its team will do all that is necessary to maintain this recognition and its accompanying label, also after 2018.

I do have a request for the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

I acknowledge that selecting and awarding this label is an important and difficult task.

Of late I notice that the return towards the awarded youth centres however, turned out to be a bit meagre.

I gather that this is an important point that deserves attention to be improved upon for the continuation, growth and succes of the Quality Label.

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Finally I would like to wish you all a very pleasant and inspiring stay here at Destelheide.

Thank you!

Guy Uyttebroeck

Director Destelheide

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