



By Hanjo Schild

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Social Cohesion and Inclusion of young people

Underlying the values and principles of Social Cohesion in our societies is the belief that all humans are born equal, that everyone counts and can play an active role in society. It is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare and well-being of all its members and to minimise disparities.

Social protection and social justice, access to rights for all, respect for the dignity of others, for diversity, individual freedom and the right of all individuals to have the opportunity for personal development, solidarity and participation in the democratic processes are key objectives of social cohesion. In the youth field, the social exclusion of young people is certainly one of the most important challenges we are facing today, not only in Europe, but in the world. Young people are confronted with multiple forms of exclusion, from the labour market, from educational structures, from social rights and from individual development processes. Many experts believe that the current global economic and financial crisis intensifies the problem considerably – beside the facts of ageing societies and enhanced migration. The figures and data provided in the article of the European Commission in this issue of Coyote speak for themselves.

Consequently both institutions dealing with the development of social and youth policies, the European Union and the Council of Europe, try to find answers to these challenges. In general terms, they seek to develop common democratic, social and legal principles for all their citizens. Both are working towards tolerant and civilised societies on our continent, for political stability, security and peace, economic prosperity, freedom and *social cohesion* – in a fairer, safer world.

In the youth policies of both institutions social cohesion and social inclusion are crucial elements aiming at the creation of more and better opportunities for youth in education, training and working life. They also aim to improve access and full participation of all young people in society, to cultural, sporting and creative activities and they aim to foster autonomy and mutual solidarity between society and young people. Particular emphasis is given to a stronger involvement of young people in the inclusion policies as such and an enhanced cooperation with policy makers. In this context a new role for youth work, which can help deal with unemployment, school failure and social exclusion, is needed, particularly supporting young

people with special needs and those who are socially excluded. The European Commission and the Council of Europe, in the context of their partnership in the field of youth, made the strengthening of social cohesion a key priority in their joint work programme. The overriding aim of the partnership’s activities is to secure equal opportunities for all, especially for those at risk of exclusion, through an exchange of knowledge and good practice and by supporting the development of a sense of solidarity. Both institutions agree on the importance of addressing the topic of social cohesion through this issue of Coyote.

It comes at the right moment: the Spanish Presidency in the European Union has made social inclusion and employment of young people one of its priorities in the first semester of 2010. 2010 has also been proclaimed as the “European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion”.

It is therefore an excellent opportunity to highlight the variety of good practice in the youth field, but also to discuss the responsibility youth work and youth policy have for the social inclusion of young people. We can also certainly learn from the contributions of other policy sectors, such as arts, culture and employment, which have developed interesting and successful models of supporting young people on their way into society and to fight poverty and exclusion. The articles in this issue of Coyote, however, present the rich experience of youth work at local and European level, of youth policy and research dealing with the many aspects of social inclusion. Together, we can make a difference! ■

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