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Ten theses on the correlation between European youth work, intercultural learning and the qualification and professionalisation demands on full and part-time staff working in such contexts

Preliminary remarks

In 1990, I published a first version of the "Ten theses on the correlation of European youth encounters, intercultural learning and demands on full and part-time staff" in the reference book *"Internationale Jugendarbeit. Interkulturelles Lernen"*¹. Some further publications and reflections in English and French followed. Starting in 1997, a revised version was published in several languages. That version remained unchanged between 1997 and 2007. In November 2007, the Council of Europe held a seminar at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. The topic was "Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: Which Ways Forward?". I was asked to speak about "The Role of Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work Today" and to challenge the 1997 theses by relating them to contemporary situations and developments.

The following paper is an attempt to revise the "old" theses² against the backdrop of recent social and political developments and, without foregoing their character as theses, to reformulate them in view of the demands this author considers important for high quality professional intercultural youth work at European level. This is no easy task considering we are dealing with nearly 20 years of development at European level. The following provides a brief overview of some of those I consider key³.

European youth work today consists of much more than youth encounters. Demands on European youth work emanate from the context that influences non-formal education. Expectations have grown. European youth work is supposed to be of clear additional benefit to the young people taking part, and there is increased demand for recognition of the insights they acquire during their experiences in non-formal learning settings, including of the contribution such experiences make to improving social integration, employability and the active European citizenship of the young people concerned. In the context of the EU's "Lifelong Learning Strategy", European youth work is expected to contribute to achieving the 8 key competences, thereby positioning itself as a key instrument for the attainment of the strategies goals.

The political conditions under which all of this is taking place in Europe have changed greatly since 1990:

¹ Oberste-Lehn, H., Wende, W., editors, Handbuch Internationale Jugendarbeit. Interkulturelles Lernen. Düsseldorf:1990

² A PDF of the 1997 version is available for download in English, French and German at: www.ikab.de

³ Also see: Otten, Hendrik, Jugendarbeit in Europa. Anregungen zur Qualifizierung pädagogischer Verantwortlicher und zur Professionalisierung pädagogischen Handelns im interkulturellen Kontext vor dem Hintergrund der Erfahrungen mit JUGEND und in der Perspektive von JUGEND IN AKTION. Documents N° 9. Jugend in Aktion. Deutsche Agentur JUGEND. Bonn:2006 www.jugendfuereuropa.de

The European Union has enlarged to encompass member states with very different democratic traditions and, resulting from these, with different attitudes towards democratic forms of participation, which become manifest in the concepts of youth policy and youth work being developed and practised in the different countries.

Deliberations on new youth policy strategies and corresponding education and training concepts, thus, require an analysis of these changes and developments – both positive and negative. The discussions at the seminar in Budapest provided me with many impulses for the revision of the theses. For this I would like to express my gratitude to the Council of Europe and the participants of the symposium.

Thesis no. 1: Today, pluralism is a more appropriate description of the European multi-cultural reality than cultural diversity!

Today, all over Europe,⁴ we are dealing with social structures that are, even if to differing degrees, characterised by cultural diversity. Attempts to seal off national cultures fail sooner or later, and public debates on whether a country is a country of immigration or not are of little help when it comes to meeting the challenges attached to the increasingly multicultural nature of contemporary European societies. Globalisation certainly plays a role. Rather emotional debates on the loss of cultural identity and the classification of ethnic groups in racial terms can still be observed. I concede that the social manifestations of cultural diversity in everyday life have become increasingly complex and partly inconsistent in our different European societies. Yet, it seems to me that the fact that "culture" refers to a dynamic process, which should be part of public discourse on a concept of justice for the cooperative shaping of social life, has been altogether forgotten. Indeed, this way of seeing culture still needs to be adequately defined and applied in the public sphere. Neglecting this has consequences: Today, it no longer makes sense to differentiate between majority and minority cultures or to promote intercultural learning as a way of counterbalancing social inequalities through education, in the way that has been attempted by existing (and even well-intentioned) models of integration. This approach has failed because there was no systematic communication and cooperation between policy makers, educationalists and public discourse in relation to the multi-cultural society. The number of so called "model countries" in Europe now helplessly and resignedly facing the sad consequences of one-dimensional and uni-directional integration concepts is quite striking.

Taking inspiration from the proposals of the original first thesis, today we need to find different answers to the following questions:

- How will we handle the value of pluralism (including the pluralism of religious practices) so present in our day-to-day lives so that a concept of justice is applied that serves as an organising principle for the whole (multicultural) society and at the same time guarantees the rights of the individual?

⁴ Europe is to be understood geopolitically in the context of the EU and Council of Europe.

A second, and even more difficult question, is

- How can we convey the need for such an approach to pluralism and justice through education and training so that young people learn to deal with (value) conflicts in a manner characterised by critical reasoning instead of exclusion, discrimination and other forms of violence?

Applied value pluralism comprises a multitude of potential conflicts and requires the acceptance of compromises that are often unsatisfactory, also for the individual. To be able to deal with such unsatisfactory outcomes requires mental mobility and the ability to enter into intercultural discourse⁵. Under certain circumstances, European youth work can contribute to the acquisition of the necessary competences for this discursive ability and create action-oriented awareness of human rights. These theses intend to provide some suggestions on how this can be achieved.

Thesis no. 2: Intercultural learning needs to deal with everyday social and political realities in Europe!

Objectively, the manifold opportunities for contact between members of different cultures that have characterised recent European history have not led to substantially more mutual understanding or increased social and personal interaction between different peoples. At the same time, it has become obvious that people feel overtaxed by the increasing presence of the multi-cultural reality and fail to interpret and classify this reality adequately. This was already stipulated in the original thesis and if we accept this as true, we need to consider in a more targeted way than in the past how shortfalls in education and training can be overcome.

“Education must provide practice for integrating into society while also immunising against it where it attempts to force people to follow stereotypes of thought and action instead of critical insight”⁶.

Since problems of stereotypical thinking and action are most visible in day-to-day life, it is necessary to look at that level to find intercultural approaches for solving them systematically. Such approaches cannot be found in ostentatious political slogans. Rather they can be found in educational concepts and corresponding educational practice that abandon the primacy of nation-state thinking, or better still of the national-cultural horizon, and which use the concept of “European citizenship” as a fundamental building block. Europe, in this sense, is a framework of values (those defined in the course of the development of European integration in the Council of Europe and the European Union) and a framework of legislation based on legal traditions already existing and structuring the diverse communities that live on the continent. The old call for intercultural learning to take place in everyday life and for intercultural education to take up and use everyday life situations has become more urgent.

⁵ See thesis 6 for more explanation

⁶ Alexander Mitscherlich, Die dialektische Funktion, die Erziehung erfüllen sollte. In: H.Haase, ed., Alexander Mitscherlich, Gesammelte Schriften. Volume III: Sozialpsychologie I. S.33 Frankfurt:1983

In Europe, we observe many more ethnic conflicts within societies and across borders today than 20 years ago⁷:

“The promise of perestroika was followed by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the Soviet empire dissolved, the multinational Yugoslav state collapsed, but from its ruins crawled the dark energies of supposed ethnic identities and ancient territorial claims. The honeymoon of a post-ideological globalisation in universal freedom soon yielded to disillusionment at the sight of conflict types thought long gone. War was waged again in Europe, minorities expelled, and the continent stood helplessly and watched what was happening”⁸.

Hence, Europe can no longer be considered to be in a “post-World War II” situation, in which the creation of understanding and reconciliation between people from the two major ideological blocks of the Cold War were the primary concerns and intercultural learning processes were designed to address them. Instead, we find ourselves in a kind of “intra-social pre-war” situation, since to this day we have not managed to establish a minimum consensus on those norms and values that rule the relationship between individual freedom and social justice in a multicultural setting (a relationship that generally harbours potential for conflict) and thus enables individuals to act adequately with regard to situation, subject, and object, ie when they act in accordance with their individual personal situation and needs and when superior societal objectives such as social justice can be fully integrated and mediated⁹. This is why we need to reach a changed understanding of intercultural learning: processes of learning that convey and reflect the connection between cognition, moral standards, political awareness, and political action¹⁰.

Thesis no. 3: Mobility can better contribute to behavioural change if perceptions of difference in the everyday life environment are continuously challenged and reinterpreted!

The original thesis contemplated how greater mobility (essentially, travelling abroad) could contribute to changing attitudes and behaviour towards other cultures and events.

⁷ In this context this publication is worth reading: Lettre international, N° 81: So leben wir jetzt. Künstler, Dichter, Denker zur Lage der Welt. Berlin: 2008.

⁸ Frank Berberich, Gruss an die Leser. In: Remark 7, page 13

⁹ In this context, a far-reaching deficit should be mentioned: The fact that discussions on intercultural learning in the past have not looked systematically and sufficiently enough at Islam as a culturally different world-view which nevertheless offers points of contact although it is meanwhile shaping and partly also thoroughly changing situations of everyday life in almost all European countries. The primarily isolated examination of individual aspects or the focussing on fundamentalist activities have contributed to reducing Islam to an unjust system that deserves political retribution and letting the great cultural achievements Islam has given to humanity sink into oblivion instead of embracing the opportunity to emphasise them as linking elements for common agreements on a concept of justice (on that topic see also: Hendrik Otten, Multikulturelle Gesellschaften und interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung – Plädoyer für einen Perspektivenwechsel. In: Hendrik Otten, Peter Lauritzen, eds., Jugendarbeit und Jugendpolitik in Europa. p. 18ff. Wiesbaden: 2004)

¹⁰ On that topic see also: Hendrik Otten, Menschenrechte.Grundwerte und Menschenrechte als normativer Rahmen politischer Bildung. (Human Rights: Fundamental Values and Human Rights as Normative Structures for Political Education) in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. (Ed.), Grundlagen unserer Demokratie (Fundamental Aspects of our Democracy), Bonn: 1988

Let us remember that in 1990 the first *Youth for Europe* programme of the then European Community had just come into being. It had partly been developed with this idea in mind and was designed to make cultural proximity possible through encounters in the context of a different culture. As such it was intended to contribute to behavioural change. Some member states regarded mobility first and foremost in the physical sense, but in its objectives and actions this first *Youth for Europe* programme already assumed that mental mobility had to be developed and fostered for a successful mobility experience, and hence, that something needed to be learned about oneself and the others to make the most of mobility encounters. These were the first steps taken towards introducing the concept of intercultural learning into a mobility programme.

Nowadays, there is broad consensus that coming into contact with another culture alone neither automatically creates understanding for being different nor prevents ethnocentricity. Likewise, travelling as such does not trigger change. Considering contemporary mass tourism, if this were the case we would expect today to live in a much better world. Instead, socio-scientific findings from the 70's and early 80's on attitudinal change through tourism still apply to many people: visits abroad for tourism usually do not result in long-term attitudinal change. On the contrary, they rather contribute to strengthening negative prejudices since the only references tourists have for interpreting the cultures they visit are those that define difference in their "home" environment. This is why new and repeated learning processes – basically also intercultural ones – are necessary during the entire life-course. And, thence the demand for anchoring intercultural learning in everyday life made in thesis no. 2. If we have made progress here, we will be able to use the potential doubtlessly provided by exercised mobility – travelling – in a more effective way.

Thesis no. 4: European youth work has developed way beyond youth exchanges and, therefore, demands other and new competences of its facilitators!

Following this line of argumentation, the original fourth thesis referred to exchange schemes with young people from different countries: an educationally reasonable alternative to tourist activities as long as certain conditions are guaranteed so that the international encounter has a lasting impact on the young person's day-to-day life. If these conditions are not present, it is extremely likely that the results of such youth encounters will not extend beyond the superficial harmony produced by its social dimension.

Again, at first a reminder of the historical context: European youth encounters, especially multilateral ones and encounters funded by European programmes, were unknown territory at the end of the 1980s – whether considering their educational requirements or their European policy foundations (c.f. the principle of subsidiarity). As a result, every single sentence of the rules for implementation of the different actions of the *Youth for Europe* programme was fought over.

The first office established by the Commission for this programme was simply called *European Community Youth Exchange Bureau*¹¹. At that time, youth encounters and corresponding initial and further training for those who facilitated them were regarded as the most important priorities for the development of European youth work¹².

European youth work today is comprised of far more than youth exchanges, even if these still constitute one important action within the current European Union *Youth in Action* programme, especially in relation to involving disadvantaged young people, the new member states, and young people from the rest of the world in the programme. It still makes sense to give this form of European youth work special attention. But, today we also have to think about other kinds of European youth work.

The preliminary remarks already mentioned some elements characteristic of today's demands on European youth work. A few additional ideas require attention here. The most important change of the past 20 years is the greater value now attached to non-formal and informal education and their recognition. Both have led to European youth work (especially, in the EU) now also being seen in a political context. The White Paper process has contributed to this¹³. The work done by the Council of Europe on the recognition and validation of non-formal education and that resulting from the Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of Youth have been equally influential. As a result, we have at our disposal a common value-oriented, consensus-based catalogue of objectives for non-formal education¹⁴. Summarising these recent European youth policy developments, demonstrates the extent to which expectations of European youth work extend far beyond selective educational and isolated youth policy action.

European youth work is meant to be efficient, to promote equal opportunities, encourage intercultural dialogue, to enable personal growth and social integration, to initiate and accompany active citizenship, and to improve employability. In short, European youth work is a form of non-formal education that is expected to provide qualifications that are publicly recognised and relevant for the biography of those involved.

If practice is to live up to these expectations, and even if only marginally, it needs to change tremendously and become implemented in a qualified manner under professional conditions. This will have many repercussions on present practices and things taken for granted.

This raises thorny questions:

¹¹ Starting in 1987, the author of these theses worked for approximately 10 years in the Brussels governing bodies of this bureau and its successor institutions, mainly being responsible for the educational programme quality including education, training, and evaluation issues.

¹² Though only by those who thought an orientation towards Europe to be important and necessary for youth work, something that did not go without saying in educational, political or circles of youth associations.

¹³ White paper by the European Commission: A new impetus for European youth. 2001

¹⁴ Keywords for this are for instance: democratic active citizenship / participation; anti-racist thinking and acting; human rights orientation in everyday life

- Who will be able to work in this field under which conditions in the future?
- What is funded for which reason?
- Who controls process and output quality according to which standards?¹⁵

Theses no. 9 and 10 will further address these issues.

Thesis no. 5: Intercultural learning should establish the “obligation to be intolerant” of violations of human rights!

In the original edition, this thesis dealt with the phenomenon of “prejudice” in the context of international youth work. From my current point of view it is still of central importance for our discussion. To refresh our memories, the original is quoted:

“Removing prejudices is one of the things called for most in the context of international youth work. One result of this is that many people hasten to assure that they do not have any prejudices. Where we discover other people have some, we take pleasure in reproaching them. International youth work must set new emphases with regard to the problem of “prejudices”. In particular, it must contribute towards moving away from moralising lectures: <There are no people without prejudices and when somebody claims not to have any prejudices, this contention is no doubt the biggest prejudice>¹⁶. We must learn to accept that we will never know everything and will therefore always have prejudices in the sense of preliminary judgements and that we even need these to a certain extent in order to achieve environmental stabilisation and behavioural confidence. They are, to a certain degree, necessary in “psycho-economic” terms for establishing one’s own identity through dissociating oneself from others¹⁷. This is not, however, a plea for people to come to terms with their prejudices. When encountering other people, even those from one’s own cultural group, such prejudices are liable to possible change. Whether and to what extent negative prejudice can, for example, be turned into “more objective” judgements also depends on the conditions under which the encounters take place. Added to this is the fact that individuals must acquire particular qualifications if intercultural learning within the context of international youth encounters is to provide substantial opportunities: We must study our own perception habits, stereotyped patterns of interpretation and schematic rules of interaction. We must, above all, become aware of the significance of selective perception: if we have a prejudice regarding a certain type of behaviour, we will, initially, observe only this behaviour again and again.

¹⁵ For more details and up-to-date information (September 2008) see the following study: Helmut Fennes and Hendrik Otten, Quality in non-formal education and training in the field of European youth work. An English version can be downloaded from: <http://www.salto-youth.net/trainercompetencestudy/> - a German version can be downloaded as documents N° 10 from: <http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de> .

¹⁶ John Dewey, quoted from R. Bergler, Vorurteile und Stereotypen. In: A. Heigel-Evers, Hrsg., Sozialpsychologie. Volume I: Die Erforschung der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen. S. 238. Weinheim / Basel: 1984

¹⁷ Developed in: G. W. Allport, The nature of prejudice. New York: 1954

The problem for intercultural education lies in the fact that it is almost impossible to remove such prejudices through purely rational argument, rather they need to be reappraised in new specific situations, i.e. changing negative prejudices through new experience reflected in a different cultural context. Although international youth encounters can also have intercultural learning effects without intended and planned intercultural learning experience, these will tend to be of a chance nature, incomplete and extremely inadequate to the general objectives set out.”

The set of problems addressed in this thesis has recently become more acute. Looking at the increasing complexity of multicultural societies and growing demands this places on individuals, we have fewer and fewer opportunities to develop well-reasoned and justified judgements on all aspects of social development. Like it or not, we will have to live with an increasing number of initial judgements. The main challenge will be to avoid discriminatory or excluding effects on others and on being different.

I believe that developing intercultural competence alongside personal and social competences – complementary to the key competences in the context of lifelong learning – is the only way to confront the insecurity and fear that results from ambivalence, and thereby to avoid discrimination, racism or any other form of exclusion.

One more aspect is important in this regard: We need a new and changed consensus in society on the notion of tolerance. I find that the term has come to be used less and less proactively. Instead, it rather appears as relating neutrality or indifference. To put it clearly: to be indifferent does not mean to be tolerant, because in being indifferent no position is taken and something is allowed to simply happen even if it contradicts ethical principles and human rights.

To counteract this, we need to set limits to the obligation to be tolerant. In other words, we need to formulate an “obligation to be intolerant”, in the sense of active intervention if human rights, as the ethical-political foundation of a European concept of justice, are violated.

Thesis 6 further expands on the concept of intercultural learning and the need for its development.

Thesis no. 6: Intercultural learning is always political!

In 1990, my introduction to this thesis read as follows:

“Intercultural learning is the collective term for the conscious pedagogical planning and realisation of European youth encounters (the major part of international youth work in quantitative terms) which endeavour to prepare the individual in an appropriate and positive manner for the living and working conditions prevailing in a multicultural society.”

Towards the end, I wrote:

“The content of intercultural learning always includes, irrespective of other subject matter, the behavioural patterns stemming from individual national traditions, whereby young people have to examine the problems arising from the clashing of such different types of behaviour in specific encounter situations and reflect on these with regard to underlying culture-specific habits of thinking and perception.”

Until now, this definition has not encountered any serious content-related opposition¹⁸. It is no longer, however, able to do justice to the diversity of non-formal learning and educational situations relevant for intercultural learning processes in a (multicultural) socio-political context¹⁹.

As such, in education aimed at the respect for and the application of human rights (i.e. in a normative context) intercultural learning is always also political learning. Intercultural learning has to contribute to the formation of a crucial minimum consensus on human rights as a concept of justice that protects and ensures individual and social rights and obligations in a multicultural European civil society. Only then can intercultural learning rightly be defined as a necessary prerequisite and as an educational approach to establishing competence for intercultural dialogue²⁰. While we see these as inextricably linked, it is nevertheless important to avoid that intercultural dialogue is abused as an alternative or replacement for intercultural learning. Intercultural dialogue without a concrete reference to the concept of justice outlined above cannot initiate learning processes and does not lead to change in society.

For its very directness and lack of ambiguity, I prefer to use the term *intercultural discourse*, and discuss it in reference to Habermas' discourse ethics²¹. On the one hand this concept provides for the linking of ethical and moral aspects with cognitive and political ones, a necessary prerequisite for intercultural learning, in my opinion. On the other, it addresses all other educational, social and political facets of intercultural learning.²²

The following are my preliminary conclusions, therefore, regarding attributes of a yet to be expanded concept for intercultural learning appropriate to today's social conditions:

¹⁸ Teresa Cunha and Rui Gomes wrote an article worth reading on the development of the term “intercultural learning”, titled: Against the waste of experiences in intercultural learning. In: Coyote N° 13. Strasbourg: 2008

¹⁹ The 1990/1997 version of the theses explicitly focused on European youth encounters, hence the respective wording, but I myself have always understood the term in a broader sense and, in retrospect, I feel I have been right in doing so. Hendrik Otten, Intentionen politischer Pädagogik im interkulturellen Bereich (1985) Interkulturelles Lernen als politische Bildung in der europäischen Zivilgesellschaft (2003). In: G.J. Friesenhahn, A. Thimmel, Hrsg., Schlüsseltex-te. Engagement und Kompetenz in der internationalen Jugendarbeit. P. 158ff. Schwalbach/Ts: 2005

²⁰ See: Remark 18

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, Die Einbeziehung des Anderen (The Inclusion of the Other). Studien zur politischen Theorie. 5. Auflage. Frankfurt: 2003

²² For more details see: Hendrik Otten in remark 9, p. 23 ff

- Intercultural learning is the characteristic for a learning multicultural society since intercultural learning processes are also aimed at active democratic citizenship;
- Intercultural learning creates the conditions for enabling people to tolerate the integrity of all cultural ways of life as a matter of principle within the limits set out in thesis no. 5 and to debate about or dissent from these ways of life with the help of democratically legitimated and politically just procedures;
- Intercultural learning is a lifelong educational process aimed at the development and stabilisation of all individuals' willingness and ability to acculturate;
- Intercultural learning is part of the political socialisation process of European civil society²³.

Before elaborating further, let me make one procedural remark. In the 1997 version theses numbers 7 to 10 dealt with the following aspects: intercultural learning as social learning; relevance of intercultural learning to the practical situation and its reach; the importance of role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity in intercultural learning, and lastly some thoughts about initial and further training of staff engaged in international youth work.

Revising the document provides me with the opportunity to opt for a slightly different structure and clearer emphasis in the remaining four theses. In the following, I firstly adapt the propositions of the 1997 theses on the three terms of role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity since they are still central to the concept of intercultural learning I am proposing, even if they are often used and not always understood. Thesis no. 8 follows with some remarks on the context of European youth work and European youth policy. Theses numbers 9 and 10 will then conclude by addressing professionalism, quality and competences for, as well as validation and recognition of, non-formal intercultural education and training.

Thesis no. 7: Role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity – as necessary as ever, if not even more so!

Our everyday lives mostly consist of situations of interaction. Each interaction – understood as an action-related communicative act – is regulated by role relationships. If nothing unusual happens, we do not have to question our roles: they have been internalised and we act accordingly. The more complex role adoption is, as a result of unconscious processes of socialisation, the more secure we feel (ego strength) and the more we believe that we are behaving in a manner appropriate to the respective interactive situation. We do not reflect on the fact that this process of role adoption is not completed once and for all at a specific moment in time. We do not think about the fact that roles always also exist in varying degrees of consistency and concreteness and are subject to change as a result of intervening events and situations.

²³ Ibid., p. 26

Without this basic possibility for change in role adoption (social ego identity) there would hardly be any chance for intercultural learning to succeed, as our interactions increasingly take place in a multicultural environment where the usual role behaviour is less and less successful in achieving the intended effect. The need for minor and major role changes, in the sense of role taking and role making, is thus increasing. In order to learn new roles and to be able to accept others, role distance is necessary. This refers to the individual ability to see and put into perspective one's own attitudes, perception habits and patterns of thought against the background of the norms of one's own culture. This ability is so important because, without this relativisation, stimuli from a different culture will not be accepted as positive learning stimuli. Instead, they will rather result in a strengthening of existing prejudice structures and a fixation on existing role patterns. Role distance is, therefore, an essential prerequisite for intercultural learning.

New understanding of an old or as yet unfamiliar role presupposes the ability to place oneself in new situations. Without empathy, perception remains confined to one's own respective cultural context and, as such, general everyday practice is also not reflected upon. Empathy is, thus, an important condition for developing the ability to interact and competence to act – both important characteristics of the ability to take on intercultural discourse as described below.

Intercultural discourse is aimed at establishing extensive agreement between the content and relationship aspect of communication and agreement between the interacting partners at the relationship level. Without empathy, without putting oneself in someone else's place and situation, this cannot succeed. A situation new to all those involved requires a common interpretation of what is perceived to be the reality of that situation, in order to develop new competence for action. Looking at the complexity of everyday situations where cultures overlap, empathy also implies the anticipated review of what can be communicated or conveyed to others as experience through action.

This addresses tolerance of ambiguity: the ability to tolerate different interests, expectations and needs (within the limits described in thesis no. 5) and to make allowances for them in situations of interaction. Apart from that, tolerance of ambiguity describes the degree to which a person can endure not being able to implement his or her own ideas and expectations. Intercultural learning can help us to avoid using competing stereotypes as a means of maintaining and asserting our own position. Unfortunately, we still all too often witness this kind of behaviour at the political level.

In the context of European youth work, this behaviour should have largely been outgrown because tolerance of ambiguity, usually in combination with role distance and empathy, is understood as a crucial basic qualification of social action in a European civil society²⁴.

²⁴ I first presented this correlation in detail in: Hendrik Otten, *Zur politischen Didaktik interkulturellen Lernens*. Opladen: 1985. The chapter *Kommunikative Didaktik als methodisches Prinzip* (p. 40 ff) in particular, explains the interplay of role distance, empathy and ambiguity tolerance with a view to the development of personal and social ego identity, the ability for intercultural interaction and competence to act. From today's point of view I still think this publication is appropriate regarding

Thesis no. 8: European youth work has to be professionalised within a wider European youth policy development strategy!

Today, European youth work is the most important field of non-formal education in Europe, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Furthermore, it is the motor of increasing awareness of European citizenship (at least in the EU political context) and for reflection on the way in which an operational, democratic, European civil society can be developed and the characteristics it should have. The field of European youth work today is basically defined by the programmes, actions and funding schemes of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Through the *Youth in Action* programme and the White Paper "*A New Impetus for European Youth*" there is increased acceptance of the idea that European youth work cannot be seen as isolated educational activities but needs to be integrated into a coordinated European concept of youth policy²⁵.

Instruments such as the *Open Method of Coordination (OMC)*²⁶ or the *Structured Dialogue* are first steps in the direction of the development of such a concept, and far be it from my intention to belittle them. They have provided important impetus for youth policy development at the level of the individual member states and have led to better quality information on the European level. However, it cannot be denied that with the beginning of the Lisbon Process (2000) and its ambitious goal to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world until 2010, youth policy has been placed under the primacy of employment and social integration objectives.

While, fundamentally, this is not wrong, it cannot be considered the full and exhaustive extent of the role of European youth work within a European youth policy strategy. Considering the great needs of young people today, especially disadvantaged young people, for orientation and support in their transitions to adult life and that the number of young people needing such support is not declining, this would not be adequate. In my opinion, the systematic use of all kinds of non-formal learning and educational situations provided for by European programmes for such purposes and more would be within the scope of action of European youth work. However, such an extended mandate needs to be politically desired (funding) and possible in administrative terms (access and procedures). Clearly, leaving the field of European youth work to a few powerful organisations is not sufficient.

Hence, European youth work needs to reposition itself, in relation to the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission and with regard to the key competences for lifelong learning, which are quite compatible with the general objectives of intercultural political (civic) education (*interkulturelle politische Bildung*).

general definitions of objectives for intercultural learning, the political legitimacy thereof, and epistemological foundations; the didactic implementation would of course be different today and follow the described demands of European youth work and a stronger focus on the political dimension.

²⁵ Also see remark 3

²⁶ The structured dialogue is one instrument of the OMC; also see remark13

As such, and in my opinion, European youth work, needs to develop a new self image based on extensive analysis, firstly of the social challenges it faces in relation to the emergence of European civil society (in other words, a changed understanding of intercultural learning as a process of political learning with socio-political vision, and of all the pedagogical-methodological implications this has for its organisation), and secondly of the standards demanded of European youth work by the key features of contemporary youth, education, and labour market policies at European level, some of which I already mentioned in the preliminary remarks. European youth work still demonstrates some clear deficits in this regard and consequently there is a need for discussion and action. Professionalism and competence, quality, validation and recognition of non-formal learning are all key to this debate. The remaining two theses will provide further detail²⁷.

Thesis no. 9: European youth work needs professionalisation and should not be afraid of it!

At the very least, European programmes express recognition of the importance that non-formal and informal education have for young people growing up. Experiences, insights, knowledge, abilities and skills obtained and acquired are recognised as being of complementary value to what can be acquired in formal education. European youth work needs to develop a clear professional profile in order to be able to demonstrate, in a manner relevant to practice, the specific positive potential of non-formal education, its verifiable results and its effectiveness, in comparison to formal education.

Apart from adequate financial resources and organisational conditions, European youth work needs qualified staff above all. The professional demands on individuals who take on responsibility in the context of European youth work will continue to increase in a dual perspective. On the one hand, these are expected to have the qualifications and competences necessary to achieve the objectives of the programme concerned and to ensure that quality educational work is delivered. Someone who only occasionally and "in passing" facilitates European youth encounters or who once participated in a training course cannot acquire these qualifications and competences. On the other hand, in the future, commonly accepted standards will have to be applied to the characterisation of the profession of European youth work in order to ensure that those engaging in this profession can access adequately recognised, protected and remunerated employment. Although European youth work today is in fact already much more of a profession than reflected in youth policy, it is still to a considerable degree defined by the fact that most of its staff are volunteers.

With a view to the political demands and the expectations of those concerned I, therefore, see the need to call for decidedly more professionalisation than has been achieved until now.

²⁷ I will closely refer to my own works in references 3 and 9 and to: Hendrik Otten, Europäische Jugendarbeit unter Qualifizierungsdruck – Plädoyer für mehr Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit. In: IJAB – Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. Hrsg., Qualität zeigt Wirkung – Entwicklung und Perspektiven. Forum Jugendarbeit International. Bonn: 2007

This does not mean that the contribution or commitment of voluntary youth workers at the European level should be underestimated or neglected. Rather, this call for more professionalisation aims at the integration of so-far unrecognised professional European youth workers into a clearly defined professional environment alongside their volunteer colleagues, in line with a concept of quality that is accepted by all stakeholders. The following are examples of characteristics of such a professional environment, not all of which are currently in place for those doing European youth work: involvement in an organisation or affiliation with a structure; a certain permanence and continuity; financial and social coverage; regular further training and cooperative discourse. For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned that professional conditions are also required for effective planning, organisation, implementation, and administration of educational processes.

Of course, the call for greater professionalisation does not only refer to the scope of work as such, but first and foremost, to the professional profile of those who function in a pedagogical capacity in European youth work. In my opinion, (specialised) academic training beneficial to their type of work and specific relevant face-to-face practice in the field are fundamental to the adequate qualification of staff given such responsibilities. Then, those competences (knowledge, capabilities and skills) which are required for conducting youth work and non-formal educational activities with an intercultural focus have to be acquired by all those involved as educators.

Such a competence profile accepted throughout Europe (at least as regards a common set of standards) is still in its infancy and faces a lot of resistance, because so far there is hardly any public discourse on what exactly European youth work can and should contribute to the development of the European civil society. Instead, the community of practice concerned has been tinkering with specific profiles tailored to a concrete programme or action. While this approach is better than nothing, it remains absolutely insufficient with regard to what needs to be done. The public discussion at European level that has been initiated on quality in non-formal education with a view to training in the context of European youth work is, thus, an important step in the right direction, all the more since it is supported by the European Commission and the Council of Europe through the SALTO network and the Partnership on Youth²⁸.

Thesis no. 10: European youth work requires a professional profile and specialised professional training like all other educational professions!

Quality has developed to become a key term in youth work, national and international, but above all in European youth work funded by programmes and actions of the European Union and Council of Europe. Pressure is increasing on the institutions and organisations that conduct non-formal education to provide evidence that they are qualified for this kind of work. In the absence of such evidence, it will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for them to access public funding.

²⁸ See remark 15. In the first section and in two annexes the study explains about quality standards in great detail, in the second section about necessary elements of competence for such a profile

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with this (see also thesis no. 9): if professional standards cannot be demanded, quality and sustainability can hardly be requested of European youth work.

A new dimension has, however, been introduced through demand for recognition and validation (certification) of the quality and results of non-formal education. The European Union's *Youth in Action* programme has taken the first step with the introduction of the Youthpass (obligatory for single actions) and the Council of Europe has also responded to this demand by developing a self-assessment tool (voluntary) for youth leaders and workers (using a portfolio approach).

The foreseeable consequence of the above is that European youth work will need to become more formalised as the required public recognition of experiences and knowledge obtained in the non-formal learning context can only be afforded if these learning results can be assessed and withstand comparison with those acquired within the formal educational system. This validation and recognition is most notably demanded by those working in the interests of disadvantaged young people. Non-formal education is seen as an approach to compensating for disadvantages such young people experience in the formal educational system and as an alternative route for them to access recognised qualifications.

This leads us to the following challenge in the form of two inter-linked questions: How can the special character of non-formal and informal learning be preserved while meeting the expectation that learning results will be externally validated so that participants gain a form of qualification valued at the same level as those certificates and confirmations issued by the formal education and training system? Is this balancing act possible?

If the didactic principles and methodological procedures of non-formal education are to remain unshaken – which I explicitly endorse – this challenge can only be met through the process of professionalisation called for above: European youth work is work – and as for any other job a specific job profile is needed. Pedagogical work with young people is a particularly sensitive field with far reaching implications for their socialisation. Therefore, wherever education, initial and further training are concerned, professional training for those conducting such work is a fundamental condition for their employment. This is already the case for kindergartens, schools, universities and vocational training institutions. Why is it not the case for European youth work?

Let us start to attempt to reach some common level of understanding concerning some competences, which if achieved, will characterise the quality of an activity (and of those who run it and graduate from it). Let us at the same time, and in relation to those competencies, consider the intercultural and political context of the emerging European civil society. And, let us have the courage to also include certain personal characteristics in the competence profile because European youth work is also work with values, with normative principles, it means working with perceptions and attitudes and requires a developed ability to make moral judgements. Together with the other elements mentioned for a competence profile, it will be possible to achieve professional standards.

Then, quality can be demanded and demonstrated. Then, validation and recognition of non-formal education will have their own value at the same level as that for formal education. For that purpose, though, time and again we have to look for answers to some vital and central questions:

“What are the radical changes we are facing today? Do we still love our lives? Are we still able to have a good idea of what is going on? What should we work on? What are the important issues? What attitude, what ethics, what knowledge do we need?”²⁹

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²⁹ Frank Berberich in: Remark 7